

My name is Jessica DeCoux. I've been an adjunct lecturer in City Tech's English Department for eleven years, teaching first year composition. First-year writing, data show us\*, are indispensable, high-stakes classes that predict students' overall success. The responsibility for teaching them falls, by a margin of roughly three to one in our department, to underpaid, under-resourced adjuncts.

I made a list of the responsibilities involved in teaching a composition course. It's too long for me to read aloud. Suffice it to say that we adjuncts are highly skilled and dedicated. We are rewarded for possessing these skills by performing dozens of hours per week of *unpaid* labor. Over one hundred of us share an office with four desks, and, at any given time, two to three *functioning* computers. We have access to two working copy machines, both of which are behind locked doors that we cannot reach without the help or permission of others. Our students cannot visit our library on the weekends because *it isn't open*. The availability of writing or ESOL-specific tutoring varies over semesters depending on the grants we get.

What does this mean? It means I watch my exhausted fellow teachers cobble together a sparse living by racing among campuses. It means holding my office hours on a bench in a corridor. It means referring my students to resources they cannot access reliably or equitably. It means bearing the humiliation of being unable to contribute meaningfully to my family's income because the knowledge and skills I have, knowledge and skills gleaned from years of advanced education, experience, and pedagogical inquiry, are treated by CUNY as worthless and easily replaceable. This means watching my colleague, a woman in her 70's with decades of service to CUNY, drag her pain-wracked body to class, because her only insurance or retirement plan is to work until she drops dead.

This situation is cruel, ineffective, and unsustainable. How absurd that this is the baseline we are begging you to maintain. How absurd that we must waste our finite energy supplicating ourselves to avoid these disastrous cuts, when the "victory" we gain by avoiding them is the right to return to austerity, precarity, and expendability as usual.

These budget cuts clearly must be avoided at all costs. However, that is not enough. We need meaningful, significant reinvestment to counteract the decades of plunder of the CUNY budget. We must reimagine what a fully-funded, fully-functioning, equitable and effective CUNY can be. Thank you.

\*Please see the final page of this document for a list of sources supporting this claim.

While I did not have time to read this aloud, here for your perusal is the list of goals, duties, and expectations for instructors of first year writing. These expectations have been explicitly set by our profession at large, by CUNY, by my college, by my fellow teachers, and by my own understanding of my role and the needs of my students:

1. Teach students to write at the college level, read at the college level, and engage in college-level critical thinking.
2. Break down each of these goals into manageable, logical, teachable steps that we can impart over the semester.
3. Expose students to a variety of genres and forms, guiding them to develop the rhetorical fluency and flexibility that will allow them to compose in any form of communication they may encounter in future.
4. Introduce students to a manageable yet meaningful selection of core canonical texts, so they do not miss out on at least the rudimentary elements of a liberal education founded in the “great works” of Western civilization. Teach these texts in a manner that is rigorous yet accessible and inviting as well as culturally and racially sensitive.
5. Use literary assignments to promote students’ empathetic abilities as well as to facilitate their self-knowledge and self-actualization.
6. Help students contextualize their reading within a cultural and historical framework that enables full comprehension and analysis while promoting their intellectual liberation.
7. Diagnose, address, and correct the gaps in skills and knowledge that prevent students from accomplishing said goals.
8. Remediate as possible, and direct students to the necessary academic support services to aid in that goal, despite the fact that our shrinking budget threatens the availability of such services.
9. Teach scholarly research skills with the secondary goal of developing students’ media literacy and helping them navigate a historically unprecedented landscape of available electronic information.
10. Spend several hours per week preparing enjoyable, engaging, interactive, appropriately-scaffolded lessons and assignments for our students that will help them develop all the above skills.
11. Assign, collect, grade, and provide helpful feedback on one to two assignments per student per week, for a total of four to twenty hours per week of grading time.
12. Make these assignments unplagiarizable, but also catch all instances of plagiarism and deal with them in a kind, fair manner that sets healthy boundaries and encourages ethical growth without discouraging the student to the point of despondency. Have fruitful class discussions about the cultural and ethical issues surrounding AI. Find creative ways to incorporate Chat GPT into our assignments.
13. Creatively and effectively incorporate technology into our classrooms and assignments to facilitate student engagement and to keep students on top of twenty-first century communication methods.

14. Encourage a growth mindset and growth mindset behaviors in students to increase their chance of success. Teach the meta-cognitive skills students will need to correct their mistakes and improve their performance over time.
15. Make sure our students find purpose and value in their composition work and can connect that work to their long-term goals.
16. Inculcate in our students a sense of belonging, helping them to see that they have a right to a college education and a right to use the facilities and resources available to them.
17. Hold regular office hours, plus occasional enhanced schedules of sign-up hours to encourage students to seek academic help.
18. Offer one-on-one support and tutoring during these times, giving help and advice while still encouraging self-assessment and independence.
19. Deliver painful news about students' progress or grades in non-judgmental and affirming ways.
20. Act as an ad hoc advisor, providing information about navigating the CUNY system and helping students access the bursar, registrar, and many other administrative offices.
21. Reach out to students, sometimes repeatedly, who are missing classes or assignments, or who seem in other ways to be struggling or at risk, so as to offer them support.
22. Act as a supportive confidante and advocate for students who do choose to share with us their painful circumstances or traumatic experiences, either in person or in writing. Accept the emotional labor of holding space for students' painful emotions.
23. Refer students to counseling or other mental health resources as necessary, up to and including walking them physically to the counseling office and making introductions.
24. Manifest a kind, warm, accepting presence in our students' lives, not only to invite their confidence and facilitate their learning, but also to counteract the emotional effects of unsupportive past teachers and to restore their faith in education.
25. Calculate final grades in a manner that offers fair, transparent assessment while accounting for the challenges students face, and that rewards effort and progress over skill while avoiding grade inflation. Submit these grades, along with all supporting documentation, within three to five days of our final class session.

## Bibliography

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