

May 8, 2023
CUNY BOT Meeting

Good evening, Trustees, Chancellor Matos.

Good evening comrades!

My name is Naomi Schiller. I am a full time professor of Anthropology at Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center. I've taught at CUNY since 2014. This is my dream job. I can think of no better way to contribute to our world than by teaching our working class, immigrant, first generation, college and graduate students in this remarkable public university.

Today, I had an advising session with a student named Angela, the first in her family to go to college. She is an eager, bright junior, and an anthropology major. As we were planning for what classes she should take next fall, what came up again and again were the many ways that you, the Board of Trustees, are failing her.

Brooklyn College is crumbling around us. Our financial aid office is understaffed, so Angela can't quite figure out if she has the funding to take summer classes. The advising office has struggled to reach students, so she is unaware of the expensive new software she's supposed to use to monitor her academic progress. Angela takes classes in rooms that are much too hot. Three of her five classes are taught by adjuncts, whose one paid office hour a week is not nearly enough to meet her and her classmates' needs. A strange black goop is leaking from the ceilings of our lab spaces. The paint is peeling in the hallways. The roaches roam free down our corridors. When my conversation with Angela turned to a paper she's working on about cross-cultural approaches to nutrition, the journal article I suggested she read is no longer available at CUNY.

The lack of staff, the underpaid adjuncts, the degraded physical plant, the limited library resources tell Angela over and over again that she does not matter.

I shared with Angela that you, the CUNY Board of Trustees announced 100 million dollars more in cuts to CUNY for 2024.

She responded: "I guess they just don't care about us, but honestly, it doesn't surprise me." Her disappointment was palpable, but she has come to expect neglect.

I am here tonight to demand that you surprise us.

Surprise us by understanding that there is nothing left to cut.

Surprise us by making budget requests to the State and City that accurately reflect our needs.

Surprise us by coming to the bargaining table tomorrow.

Surprise us by taking some risks to for CUNY.

And to my dear comrades in the room, my Union siblings, I think we are clear that it is unlikely that this Board will surprise us.

Whether they are constrained by their relationships, or fear, or an erroneous sense that they have no power to create a fully funded CUNY, we—the faculty, staff, and students--will not settle for crumbs. We know that together WE have the power to refuse austerity and fight for the university where Angela, and all the rest of us, can thrive. See you in the streets!