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I am testifying here to urge the Board of Trustees to renew the three year appointments for adjunct faculty and, indeed, to make them a permanent part of our contract.

I was chair of the English department from 2014 until 2021, which is to say that I was chair when the three-year appointment pilot program was introduced. While many departments are dependent on adjunct labour, the Hunter English department literally could not function without them. Apart from our full-time Rhetoric and Composition faculty, who teach our composition courses occasionally, adjuncts are the sole instructional staff for English 120 and 220, which comprise the composition requirements. Plus, since our full-time faculty has shrunk precipitously – in the past decade we have lost more than two dozen faculty and hired only two – adjuncts also teach most of the introductory courses for our major. Given Hunter’s and our major’s large enrollment, that means we employ about 150 adjuncts each semester.

As you can imagine, scheduling this many people, as I did as chair, is daunting. While we have long-time adjuncts who can be relied on to teach, it would be difficult to staff sections that were opened close to the beginning of the semester – not knowing whether they would be guaranteed two classes adjuncts would already have taken work elsewhere. The two weeks before the semester were a mad rush to try to match instructors to sections, emailing adjunct faculty to see if they could take on an extra class, and occasionally hiring new instructors with minimal experience just to fill a section.

The three year appointments reduced this chaos immeasurably. I had a cadre of adjuncts that I could slot into two classes, and move around into empty sections if their classes were under-enrolled. I didn’t have to worry that they’d be automatically taking work elsewhere because they didn’t get enough work at Hunter. Moreover, adjunct morale improved noticeably. Rather than feeling like fungible cogs in a machine, adjuncts told me that even this minimal job security relieved anxiety. Adjunct faculty could build real relationships with students. They could – and did – take parental leaves and fellowships around the country without losing their seniority. Our department felt like a more humane place, where the crucial work that adjuncts provide the college was acknowledged.

Ending this program is not pedagogically sound or administratively efficient, and –to be honest – it represents a heartless disregard for the faculty who are the backbone of the university.