

Board of Trustees Testimony
Tim Cusack
April 1, 2024

Chancellor Matos, Chairperson Thomas, and members of the board, my name is Tim Cusack, and I am an adjunct lecturer in Theatre at Hunter College. I have also been serving as the Production Manager for the department since January of this year, covering for a fellow adjunct who is presently out on medical leave this semester.

We could talk about many things today. However, I'm *not* going to focus on how distressed I am that, after teaching at CUNY since 2015 and finally having earned my eligibility for a 3-year appointment, the university now wants to force me to wait even longer for less benefit. I'm *not* going to discuss how, after more than two months of work overseeing the production demands of the department, I still have not been paid a single dime for any of it. I'm *not* going to share how demoralizing and insulting it is to be remunerated under the title and pay rate of a "college assistant." I'm *not* going to berate the university for its apparent foolish shortsightedness in relying on a revolving cadre of adjuncts over the past two years to fill in for what is a full-time managerial *and* professorial position. Institutional knowledge is real, the systems in place here at the university are bureaucratically complex, and this constant turnover of folks leads to unnecessary mistakes, delays, and wasted money.

Which brings me to what I *do* want to speak about today: the crisis of understaffing at Hunter and across CUNY. When I stepped into the production manager role, I was no fool about what the position entailed and I was prepared to work far more hours than what I would be paid. Somebody had to or else the department was at risk of not providing this core pedagogical experience. We were forced to cancel the show last semester, and it was my job to ensure that this didn't happen again.

What I wasn't prepared for was how nearly impossible it would be to actually do my job because of the convoluted purchasing processes in place here and the appalling lack of staff to implement them. I completely understand the need for fiduciary oversight and a centralized

system to manage it, but when the complicated CUNYBuy system involving multiple stakeholder sign-offs is crippled by lack of staff, nothing gets done, especially when workers are out sick. There are currently only three employees in the Hunter Purchasing Department for the entire college. This has had a disastrous effect: The two most important scenic design elements of our current production never materialized because the person shepherding the process was so overwhelmed he didn't have time to pick up the phone, call Home Depot, and confirm the order, as the vendor required. This became a safety issue for our students, as adding a new component to the set design at the last minute presented the very real risk of somebody in the cast being injured. This also affects the reputation of the college: I doubt this particular set designer will ever work for us again, as she was so distraught over what happened, and my own reputation as a producer was damaged by this experience. The New York theatre community is quite small and word travels fast. If CUNY does not seriously address the understaffing in Purchasing and other units, we will soon be unable to provide our students with access to the kind of high-quality, visiting teaching artists that their counterparts at the city's private universities and colleges take for granted. I urge you to address the crisis of understaffing at CUNY.