

CUNY BOT Testimony 4-1-24

Dear Members of the Board, faculty, staff, and students. My name is Maria Contel, and I am a full professor at the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at Brooklyn College. I am also Director of the Brooklyn College Cancer Center.

I am here today to testify and advocate for resources for the colleges in the boroughs other than Manhattan. In times of austerity and scarcity, the distribution of resources is not the same at every campus. For several years now, and especially in the science disciplines, there has been an unequal allocation of resources for the oldest senior college campuses. After the decade of Science, CUNY decided to provide more support to the campuses in Manhattan (mostly City and Hunter College). Thus from 2010 to 2020 there were more hires, and CUNY established the Advanced Science Research Center, and supported the construction of new buildings and laboratory rental space at outside medical schools. Now, there are construction projects underway at Baruch and Hunter. Do not get me wrong, I am happy for these colleges, and I collaborate extensively with the ASRC. I am not advocating for removing resources from these places. On the contrary, I came to tell you that providing resources is strategy that works. When you invest and allocate resources, you can hire faculty members who in turn will excel, providing outstanding education, scholarship, prestige, grants, initiatives, and resources for their colleges and the university, enhancing the overall university classification ranking and students' education experience.

However, in moments of "austerity" when CUNY makes cuts and stops, reduces, or slows down meaningful capital projects, this is not done equally across the university. The colleges in the outer boroughs have suffered a real disinvestment. They have suffered accumulative hiring cuts over the years, and they have not undergone necessary renovations and maintenance of buildings. Many students are forced to go to other Manhattan colleges in CUNY which affects enrollment and makes the outer borough colleges look like the "bad guys". You may think that we should have a consolidation of resources, and that students can travel. This would be true for a typical college young student not working and without family obligations. This profile only represents a fraction of our students. When you do not invest in personnel and infrastructure in the outer boroughs, you are forcing students to travel, limiting their educational opportunities due to long commutes. Our students deserve to choose campuses that are convenient to them geographically and close to their communities. Our faculty and staff members also deserve better.

Board members, this is an issue of equity and CUNY needs to address it now. At the outer borough colleges, we need investment to support our educational mission, and initiatives that will bring funds to the whole university and will increase enrollment. NYC is not only Manhattan, and CUNY is also not only Manhattan but the biggest urban university in the world! Please board members, do not forget the outer borough colleges. Please advocate for a more generous budget from New York State. Thank you!