

March 28, 2024

Dear Members of the CUNY Board of Trustees,

My name is Jack Kenigsberg. I am an adjunct lecturer in the department of English at Hunter College, a non-teaching adjunct who directs the writing center there, and a diabetic.

I only discovered that I have diabetes after I finally got health insurance through CUNY as a teaching adjunct. I hadn't seen a doctor in over 10 years, so I was relieved to be able to get a primary care physician and make an appointment for a basic health assessment. When I was reviewing my medical history with my new doctor, I mentioned a family history of diabetes. He gave me an A1C test on the spot, diagnosed me with type 2 diabetes, and immediately put me on medication.

I was later diagnosed with a retinal disorder due to diabetes mellitus. Every 8-10 weeks, I am required to have medication injected directly into both of my eyes. The process is even more uncomfortable than it sounds. My eyes become swollen in their sockets for hours, and remain bloodshot for days, especially around the injection sites. However, without these injections, I would be at increased risk of permanently losing my eyesight. With them, the leakage around my retinas has substantially decreased and my ophthalmologist is cautiously optimistic that some of the damage may be reversed. The discomfort is a small price to pay for a chance to stave off blindness.

The injections I receive to preserve my eyes, the two medications I take to regulate my blood sugar, the doctors and specialists I see who monitor my health are affordable to me only through the insurance I receive as an adjunct at CUNY. However, my insurance is contingent on my teaching six credits each fall and spring semester. Adjuncts do not receive health insurance immediately upon being hired, but must wait at least three semesters to qualify. And we can lose it at the drop of a hat. Or a course.

If I were to lose even one class due to low enrollment, or any other reason, I would not only lose income; I would lose my health insurance and, with it, my access to the medical care I need to control my diabetes and keep my eyesight. And so I spend every August and every January obsessively checking the number of students enrolled in my classes, my stomach

twisting into knots for fear the number of enrolled students will dip below whatever the cutoff is for the class to run.

It is a terrible thing to be chronically ill. It is made even more terrible by the constant anxiety that the little safety net I have might be ripped away at a moment's notice if my classes do not fill.

You, the Board of Trustees, have for many years presided over a deliberate strategy to replace full time faculty with contingent faculty. We, the adjunct faculty, teach the majority of the classes at CUNY. We spend an untold number of unpaid hours preparing our lessons, grading papers, writing letters of recommendation, mentoring our students, and so much more. All the while, we are cut off from resources, must scramble for office space and office supplies, and lack any kind of say in our departments. We do so much for this university, and we ask the university for so little in return. Pay on par with our full time colleagues who teach the exact same courses we do. A bare modicum of job security. An end to the constant, nagging fear that we might lose our hard-won health insurance.

Teaching at CUNY should not pose a hazard to our health. You need to do better by us.

Thank you,
Jack Kenigsberg
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