

New York State and National Higher Education Labor Leaders Urge CUNY to Expand Job Security for Adjunct Faculty

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Felix Matos Rodríguez
Chancellor, City University of New York

William Thompson
Chairperson, Board of Trustees of the City University of New York

City University of New York
205 East 42nd Street
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From: State and National Higher Education Labor Leaders

Dear Chancellor Matos Rodríguez and Chairperson Thompson,

No trend has shaped public colleges and universities more profoundly over the past two decades than the shift toward contingent employment. This shift has created an underclass of low-wage academic gig workers, eroded academic freedom and shared governance, and threatened educational quality. Research has shown that student outcomes correlate directly with their contact with faculty members who have job stability and fair wages and benefits. The Professional Staff Congress (PSC) has been among the leaders nationally in charting a course in collective bargaining and advocacy to contain the “adjunctification” of the higher education workforce. They have been effective in pursuing better wages, job stability, health insurance, and other support for contingent faculty, and have partnered with lawmakers to increase funding for CUNY to hire more full-time faculty.

When the PSC reached agreement with the CUNY administration to pilot a multi-year appointment for the university’s longest serving teaching adjuncts starting in fall 2017, it was a breakthrough for higher education. More than 11,000 adjuncts teach at CUNY as compared to roughly 7,000 full-time faculty, and the pilot program recognized that those on whom the colleges rely most heavily deserve more in return than a short-term, totally insecure appointment. And they deserve reliable health insurance, for which these appointments make them eligible. Over the eight academic years of the pilot program, more than 3,000 adjunct faculty members have received multi-year appointments, roughly 2,500 of whom continue to serve today on such an appointment.

Across the country, higher education unions have recognized and emulated this provision, adapting the PSC-CUNY contract language. It would be disastrous for CUNY, whose mission has been to serve the working people of New York, to reverse the progress made for thousands of contingent employees. Given the national prominence of this issue, that would constitute a move against CUNY’s adjunct faculty and against labor on a broader scale as well.

Enhancing the multi-year adjunct appointment agreement is a PSC priority in their ongoing contract negotiations with CUNY. Rather than eliminating or severely diminishing the multi-year appointment provision, the CUNY administration should recognize the dedication and value of the faculty members in these roles and the benefits of a more secure teaching workforce to educational quality and student outcomes. Moreover, health insurance eligibility for CUNY teaching adjuncts depends on maintaining consistent contact hours each semester, so there are clear health principles at stake.

New York State made significant new investments in CUNY in recent budget cycles because strong public university systems are critical for our collective success. CUNY cannot achieve its full strength and high quality without a more job-secure academic workforce. We strongly urge the university administration to broaden access to multi-year appointments for teaching adjuncts.

Sincerely,

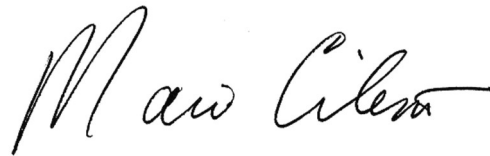
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