

CUNY Board of Trustees Public Hearing Testimony | April 1, 2024

Why I'm Leaving Brooklyn College BOT Testimony Carolina Bank Muñoz

This is my 20th year teaching Sociology at CUNY. In more ways than one, this was my dream job. Educating first-generation students, working class students, immigrant students, and students of color has been a privilege. As a first-generation immigrant Latina (one of only 29 on campus), I know firsthand how much Brooklyn College students struggle to achieve their educational goals. Many are housing and food insecure, others are working part and full-time jobs, and many are caretakers. As a professor and a union activist, I have been deeply invested in these students and the success of this institution.

But I'm leaving. I no longer feel that I can serve the students and the mission of the institution as I once did. Brooklyn College is in a fight for its life. Our beautiful campus needs nearly a billion dollars to fix crumbling infrastructure, the result of decades of state neglect.

For years under the Cuomo administration, CUNY did not submit budget requests that reflected the needs of the University. For the past two years, we have seen additional investment from the state. However, this year, CUNY once again submitted a budget request to the city & state that does not meet the needs of the University.

This means students, faculty, and staff have to learn and work under impossible conditions every single day. The wifi is unreliable, which means we often can't use even the simplest technology in the classroom, like showing a film. There is no cafeteria on campus, ceiling tiles are loose and falling, and the temperature in offices and classrooms swings between 50 and 100 degrees, making it difficult to concentrate and work. Some of the oldest buildings have mold problems. We are told not to eat in our offices to keep the rats out. Last year, a Psychology professor reported in a meeting that black goop was dripping from the ceiling tiles onto desks and lab equipment. The Vice President of Facilities suggested she bring an umbrella. He wasn't joking.

After enduring years of these abysmal working conditions, many faculty and staff are choosing to leave. One of several resignations this year is the director of our beloved health clinic, frustrated by the elimination of services that our students desperately need and deserve. This attrition saves the College money in the short term, while creating a negative feedback loop. The more attrition, the more the workload increases for those who remain. The more the workload increases, the more people choose to leave or retire. As more people leave, students cannot access the services they need. As fewer students enroll, courses get canceled, destabilizing the lives of contingent faculty. When you bring together collapsing infrastructure, chronic understaffing, and low enrollment you create a tailspin of doom.

CUNY leadership has accepted the model of the neoliberal university, the same model that is endangering public education across the country. It prioritizes cost cutting over investment and sees students solely as a "revenue stream" rather than the next generation of change makers. CUNY leaders need to challenge these logics and fight for adequate public funding to support

CUNY's transformative mission. Our city and state leaders need to invest in this incredible institution.

We need CUNY to settle a great contract for faculty and staff. Our contract expired nearly a year ago, and CUNY's below inflation economic offer does not meet our needs. The soaring cost of living in New York City makes it difficult for faculty and staff to pay for housing, childcare, and other basic necessities. Our salaries are not competitive with comparable institutions.

Many of us have stayed at Brooklyn College because we are deeply committed to our students, but this is increasingly difficult to do. A few months ago, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst recruited me to be an agent of change. Their offer will allow me to innovate and serve students and the community the way I think college professors should. For me it was an excruciating decision to leave, but one I felt was necessary. It's not too late for CUNY to turn things around. Many dedicated and talented faculty and staff remain—for now—and will remain if CUNY and the state and city provide the resources and conditions to fulfill CUNY's mission.