

Board of Trustees Public Hearing Testimony, 4/1/24

Prof. Craig Bernardini, English, Hostos Community College

Hello and welcome to our first day of ENG 110 Expository Writing at Hostos Community College. My name is Craig Bernardini; you can call me Professor Bernardini, or Mr. Bernardini, or professor; you can call me Craig, if you feel comfortable doing so. I need to get a certified roll, so please make sure to sign the sheet that's going around. We may also need to check your bursar's receipt, to make sure you're in the right place. I'm going to spend a fair amount of time today reviewing the syllabus with you and taking any questions you have. But this is a writing class, we'll be writing almost every day in class, sometimes a little, sometimes a lot. One of my goals this semester is to persuade you that writing isn't simply transcribing some pre-existing thought; it is actually a way of shaping thought, and by doing so coming to think more clearly and with greater sophistication. As the saying goes, "How do I know what I think until I read what I write?"

My colleague Prof. Robertson, from whom I have learned a great deal, uses the term "thINK" (like "thinking in INK") to describe these in-class writing activities (and they needn't always be in class) that give us the opportunity to articulate our ideas in writing, and hence come to know our thoughts better and indeed think more clearly. Sometimes I'll use these thINK activities to present you with hypothetical or "what-if" scenarios, which I like to call thought experiments, a term scientists use to describe experiments carried out in the mind instead of in the lab. Here, our lab is the sheet of paper in front of you.

Our thought experiment for the day—one that is, alas, far from hypothetical—is on the screen behind you. Follow along with me as I read:

In the classroom next to ours, a teacher is teaching the same course, Expository Writing, ENG 110. Quite possibly she has the same degree I do, a doctorate; at minimum she has an MA or MFA. She produces scholarship, as I do. She has been employed at the college for almost as long as I have. However, this teacher makes about a third of what I make. Again, same classes, and quite possibly same degree. I also have tenure, which is a form of job security. Because she's been here for several years, she's on a 3-year contract, which ensures she's able to get a couple of classes here every semester for those three years. That gives her a little bit of job security, too, so she can breathe a little easier, and worry a little less about how she's going to pay the rent next year, how she's going to feed her kids—though her salary is far from adequate to make ends meet in New York, it must be said. These three-year contracts are part of a pilot program that's sunseting this year, which means that, when her contract expires (and hers does at the end of the school year), she goes back to having almost no job security at all. Most egregiously, our employer, the City University of New York, is trying to weaken these 3-year contracts, by shortening them to just 2 years, making people wait 12 years before they're even eligible—that's more than twice as long as it took me to get tenure!—and weakening the protections these contracts afford. In other words: they want this long-standing colleague, teacher and scholar who makes a third of what I do for the same work I do to have even less job security than they do now.

Pretend for a moment—this is a thought experiment, remember—pretend for a moment you run the university. How do you justify to her, or to me, ethically speaking, the fact

that she is paid one third of what I make for virtually the same labor I do, and that you're weakening the modest amount of job security she actually has? Take a few minutes to write your answer, and then we'll have a share out.

[...]

Time's up. Is your sheet blank? That's because *there is no ethical justification for the situation I have just described, and you know this.*

Do the RIGHT thing, CUNY. *Adjuncts need more job security, not less, and they need pay parity.*