

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

James Davis, PSC President

We do this work because we believe in our students and in the mission of our colleges. This has already been a tough year for the faculty and staff, but I believe the Trustees and the Chancellery have it in your power to make it a successful year ultimately.

Many of us have seen colleagues leave this year because of the pressure to close budget deficits preemptively on our campuses. Some have been laid off, some have pursued better opportunities elsewhere, but in almost every instance they haven't been replaced, leaving more work for everyone else - whether the professional staff or the faculty. You can't cut \$11 million from the adjunct budget, as CUNY has this year, without impacting the departments, to say nothing of the instructors themselves. You can't reduce the community college ranks by more than 400 full-time positions overall since 2021 without compromising the services we provide and undermining morale. I want to challenge you and every member of the Board to fight with every fiber for what our colleges need in the state and city budgets being negotiated as we speak. That is your responsibility as Trustees.

I also want to challenge you to reach a fair, strong agreement with the PSC in bargaining. As you hear from my colleagues, three recurring themes resonate: compensation, job security, and professional respect.

- Fair compensation means salaries that account for the cost of living in the New York area and for the erosion through inflation of the real dollar value of our raises. It also means substantial equity for job titles that have been left behind.
- Professional respect means promotional opportunities, a right to some proportion of remote work for professional staff, workplace safety protections, and class sizes that are pedagogically appropriate.
- Job security is pivotal to resolving the contract negotiations. The university has proposed measures that would unwind important contractual job security provisions.

I want to focus my remaining time on the successful pilot program for multi-year appointments for teaching adjuncts. Please know that our negotiations are being closely monitored, not just by the university's funding partners in Albany and City Hall, but also by academic labor unions everywhere. I'm holding a letter to you signed by labor leaders at the state and national level: Melinda Person, president of New York State United Teachers, Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, Irene Mulvey, president of the American Association of University Professors, and Mario Cilento, president of the New York State AFL-CIO. They say in part, "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 [...] 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.”

As goes CUNY, so goes public higher education in New York City, New York State, and the whole country. Trustees: you have the opportunity to lead on this issue - seize it. Send your negotiations team back to the bargaining table with the green light to work with the PSC to improve job security at CUNY, for adjunct faculty and all job titles.