

My name is Jeff Ballerini, an academic adviser for F-1 visa and undocumented students at Queensborough Community College and I wish to speak out against the cuts that have been levied against CUNY. During my decade-long tenure, the College's Center for International Affairs, Immigration, and Study Abroad has struggled under great adversity that has been the direct result of pervasive austerity and chronic structural underinvestment.

In 2019, our department physically shrank when management relocated the entire complement of academic advisers stationed across campus to the Library Building. This move triggered a cascade of relocations that pushed me into my colleague's office space. She, in turn, was shoehorned into the cramped reception area with the secretary where she operates to this day.

Not only are we subject to a substandard working environment, but we have also lost key services and programs over time. When COVID-19 shut down the world in March 2020, we had to abandon our participation in the Global Citizenship Alliance, a prestigious leadership training program where students from other U.S. universities discuss issues of worldwide importance and how to become agents of change in their communities. At the outset of the pandemic, the College took away the funding for us to participate in this singular program. Despite persistent lobbying by our department head, these funds have not been restored, nor has the College given any indication that they ever will be.

As we are about to conclude our second year of resumed on-campus operations, austerity continues to undermine our basic administrative functions. Our OTPS budget has been slashed repeatedly and we sometimes must wait weeks or more to receive supplies to keep the office running. Last year, I spent nearly thirty minutes using a paper cutter to convert a stack of legal paper to letter size so we could print and distribute to our caseload documents critical to their immigration status.

However, all this pales in comparison to the hardships ahead if the management continues to fail to invest in CUNY. Last June, our office assistant left her position for another job, resulting in a twenty-five percent staff reduction and forcing our staff to divide among ourselves the variegated roles the office assistant performed. Such a loss was especially grievous given that we onboarded 100 international students for the fall 2023 term and are currently expecting over 120 for Fall 2024. Now that the crisis phase of the pandemic is past and the world has reopened, students overseas are now able to obtain an F-1 visa to come Queensborough. This has created a population surge the likes of which we have never seen. Because of this massive influx, students must wait weeks before they can see me for advisement and as there are nearly five months left before the start of the fall term in late August, the number of new students will only grow.

Instead of pushing for more spending cuts and savings by attrition, the Board must lead the charge for greater investment. To this end, we call upon management to support the New Deal for CUNY, state legislation which will increase the faculty and staff more strongly to student ratios that are crucial to providing the services that will retain students and give them the quality education that they deserve as well as increase the vibrancy of public higher education. Put down the bone saw, pick up the bandages, and join us in the fight for a better future for CUNY!