

Dear Board of Trustees,

I am an Adjunct Assistant Professor at Hostos and Hunter where I teach fine art and media design. This year I became eligible for a multi-year contract, guaranteeing that I will maintain two courses and health insurance for three academic years, a minimum amount of security in a job landscape entirely full of flux.

I attended the Feb. 29th contract negotiation session between PSC and CUNY when management described the terms of their counter proposal to extend the multi-year appointments. Their proposal states that adjuncts would need to maintain two classes for *12 years* in one department—an increase of 240% and an enormous feat in and of itself—in order to be eligible for a *two year* contract that can be canceled essentially at whim. The terms are so egregious, I wanted to cry and laugh at the same time. I can only read management's proposal, cynically, as a harsh bargaining strategy.

The multi-year appointments give adjuncts—people with the highest level of education in their field—a basic sense of security in a career that offers less opportunity, security, prestige, and quality of life each year. Despite teaching 3 courses per semester, I have a second job to make up the salary difference I would receive in a tenure-track line. As a 36-year-old with student debt from an Ivy League degree, I live with roommates, paycheck to paycheck. I'm relatively young and single; if I were raising a family, the pay and benefits I receive as an adjunct at CUNY would not suffice and I would be forced to move to the private sector. As is, I am on the lookout for a position that will guarantee me better security, and when I receive that offer—if it comes from outside CUNY—I will sadly leave behind the relationships I've built at this university I love over seven years.

It's only because I have department supervisors who individually recognize the quality of my teaching and dedication and who make a special effort to guarantee I maintain my workload that I am now on a multi-year contract. Can you imagine how difficult it will be to maintain six credits consistently for *twelve years* for adjuncts to be granted a thin, short-lived contract? This proposal should be offensive to anyone who cares about quality, public education because adjuncts *are the faculty of CUNY*. We teach the majority of classes. We deliver what CUNY promises in its advertising: to be an excellent college degree at little cost to students with dreams. Can you imagine CUNY without 60% of its courses because adjuncts got fed up with unlivable conditions?

It's well known that universities increasingly rely on adjunct labor each year. These jobs usually do not offer benefits, can be canceled within days of their start date, and vary season to season. Can you imagine if *your* job and benefits were up-in-the-air every five months? An Adjunct Lecturer at CUNY who teaches four courses—a very full-time load—makes about \$44,000 a year. Union efforts in NYC in recent years (such as the News Guild where I am represented at my second job) have acknowledged that \$65,000 is a minimum salary floor to survive the cost of living in the NYC area. Reliance on adjunct labor is an equity issue. CUNY employs more adjuncts per student than SUNY but has a more diverse student body, meaning the "whiter" the student body is for one of New York's public campuses, the higher likelihood that students will have access to full-time faculty, who are much less likely to have second or third jobs dividing their attention from students. A report by the Delphi Project on quality of education at the University of Southern California demonstrated that "rising numbers of part-time faculty members and their working conditions adversely impact various measures of student success, including diminished graduation rates, lower grade point averages, greater difficulty selecting majors and persistence."⁽¹⁾ If the Board of Trustees cares about the quality of education at CUNY and cares about racial justice, it should care about providing minimum quality of

life conditions for the majority of CUNY's teaching force because it is clear that providing basic security to adjuncts allows us to focus more energy to our teaching and mentoring, rather than searching for and executing jobs outside CUNY.

Today under 22% of adjuncts are on multi-year appointments. CUNY Management has given little explanation for why the current multi-year appointments are not working, but has suggested that they don't allow departments enough flexibility to assign courses. If I'm doing my math right, 49% of CUNY faculty today work semester to semester without any guarantee of maintaining their job or their limited benefits (2). That's plenty of flexibility—too much—as is for CUNY departments to cut professors' jobs willy-nilly. The PSC calculates that with CUNY's new proposal, only 300 adjuncts—2.7%—would be eligible for a multi-year contract. If CUNY will continue to rely on adjunct labor as a majority of its teaching force, it must do everything in its power to offer *more* security, not less, in order to prevent us from taking full-time jobs at better funded institutions. Any politician knows that you can't *diminish* benefits that have already been granted. CUNY's lack of investment in its adjunct work force—the majority of professors who teach and mentor students—is a clear signal that it doesn't care about the quality of education students receive, and for that matter, the quality of life of its students and faculty. Show us respect and invest in the quality education that CUNY students deserve by strengthening adjunct job security.

Sincerely,

Emmy Thelander
Adjunct Assistant Professor
Hunter College, Hostos Community College

(1) Colleen Flaherty, "The Full-Time Faculty Factor," *Inside Higher Ed*, December 01, 2021, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/12/02/race-and-full-time-faculty-student-ratios-suny-cuny>

(2) 8,900 adjuncts without a multi-year contract of a total teaching force of about 18,300 CUNY faculty = 49%