

**TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF
HIGHER EDUCATION JOINTLY WITH CIVIL SERVICE AND LABOR**

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Oversight - Adjunct Faculty Employment at the City University of New York

Thank you, Chairs Barron and Miller and members of the Committees on Higher Education and Civil Service and Labor, for holding this oversight hearing on adjunct employment at CUNY. Adjunct employment at CUNY urgently needs your oversight.

I am honored to be here today with my PSC colleagues to speak on behalf of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY and to represent the thousands of talented, dedicated adjunct faculty and staff at The City University of New York. CUNY's over-reliance on adjunct labor is an issue for every member of the faculty and professional staff at CUNY, whether we are employed part-time or full-time, and it is an issue with serious consequences for students.

I want to talk about three things today:

- 1) the alarming trend toward *increased* part-timization at CUNY;
- 2) the pernicious way in which CUNY's system of part-time labor allows the University to pretend that massive budget cuts are tolerable; and
- 3) what needs to be done.

Higher education has one of the worst labor systems of any industry, and certainly the worst in the professions. According to a 2018 [analysis of federal data](#) by the American Association of University Professors, nearly three-quarters of all faculty positions are off the tenure track. They are on short-term, contingent, and/or part-time contracts; most have little or no job security, many have few benefits, and almost all are underpaid.

Imagine a comparable employment situation in any other profession: medicine, law, engineering or public school teaching. Under successive neo-liberal governments of both Democrats and Republicans, the United States has systematically hollowed out the profession of college teaching.

Even within a scandalous national labor system in higher education, CUNY is an outlier: CUNY is one of the largest employers nationally of adjunct faculty and—increasingly—adjunct staff. And the proportion of part-time to full-time faculty and staff is growing.

You will hear today about the damage that system inflicts on individual lives, on education and on the profession. I want to reflect for a moment on how the adjunct system works to legitimize and facilitate massive cuts to CUNY's budget. We have seen the system at work this year.

The political position of the CUNY administration has been not simply to *accept* devastating cuts in State and, to a lesser extent, City funding, but to *make cutting easy and routine*. By employing

thousands of academic staff and faculty on short-term contracts, the CUNY administration can claim that they are simply not renewing those contracts every time they are asked for a cut. Instead of resisting budget cuts and demanding what our students need, the CUNY administration uses its system of precarious labor to facilitate and invisibilize massive budget cuts. The message is that CUNY can withstand cuts—no problem; we will just decimate our labor system by replacing thousands of secure, decently paid jobs with insecure, underpaid ones.

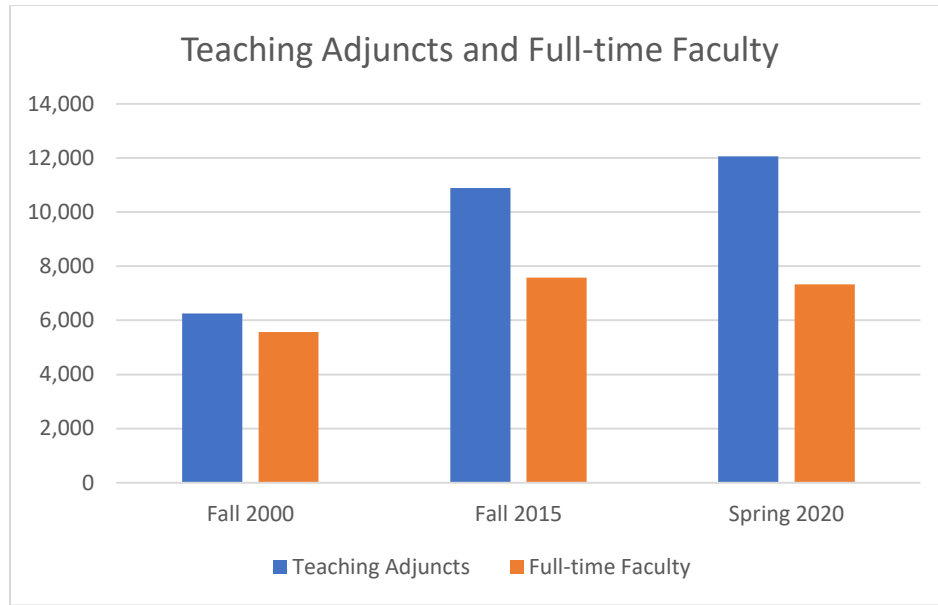
The PSC is well aware of the current State and City budget situation, explained at length by CUNY's Vice Chancellor Sapienza today. But VC Sapienza presents the budget as an immutable fact. Budgets represent choices, and the CUNY administration has chosen to hide behind its horrible system of adjunct labor to normalize massive and unsustainable budget cuts. The PSC calls on CUNY to make the choice to demand full funding—not provide an easy pathway to applying cuts that make more and more people part-time.

I want to emphasize that CUNY adjuncts are both part-time and contingent—except for those for whom the union has struggled and won protections. The PSC is very proud of what we accomplished as a union in the last contract and previous contracts, and with the support of both full-timers and part-times. But, as you know because the two committee Chairs here today were arrested in protest with us, PSC members, students and community supporters had to campaign, and protest and take a strike authorization vote to get there.

CUNY's labor system is a disgrace, and the reasons the system exists have everything to do with racist disinvestment on the part of the State and City, and institutional silence and complicity on the part of the CUNY administration. Ultimately, CUNY's labor system undermines students. No matter how dedicated and super-committed CUNY's adjuncts are and how many unpaid hours they give to their students—and they do—students still suffer when the majority of their instructors are working without job security and without the support they need to do their best work.

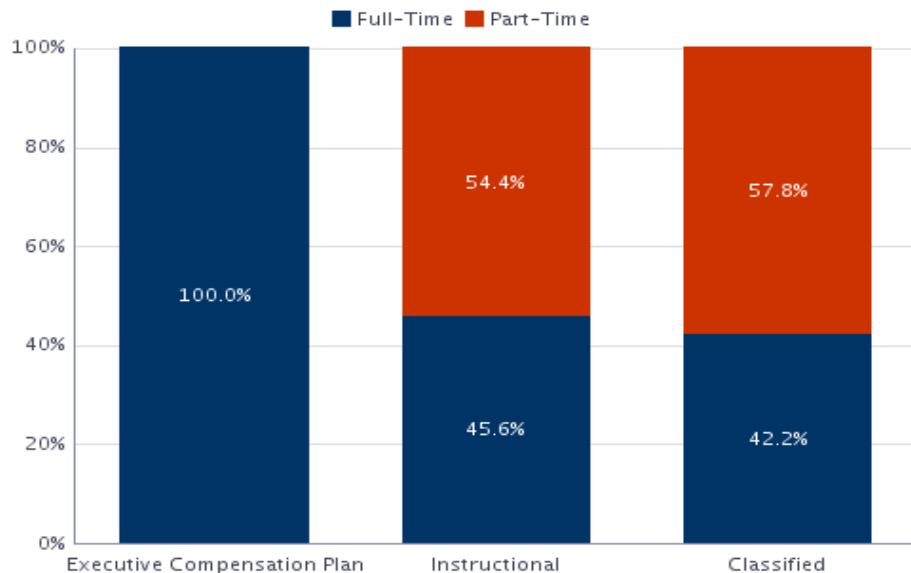
Worse, CUNY's trend is toward *increasing* part-time and contingent labor:

- In 2000, CUNY employed 5,500 full-time faculty and 6,258 part-time faculty.
- In 2015, CUNY employed 7,500 full-time and 10,900 part-time faculty.
- In 2019, CUNY employed 7,325 full-time and 12,000 part-time faculty.
- And in addition, CUNY now employs nearly 2,000 part-time professional staff.



Source: Teaching Adjuncts from Staff Facts and Full-time Faculty from CUNY First

Compare this employment pattern to the pattern of employment for high-paid CUNY managers, depicted in the graph below. While more than half of the instructional and classified staff at CUNY are part-time, precisely zero percent of the managers on Executive Compensation Plan are employed part-time. That structure speaks volumes about what the CUNY administration values and the kind of jobs they want for themselves: when it comes to top management, CUNY makes sure that every one of the jobs is full-time, with full benefits and full pay.



Source: [Staff Facts Fall 2019](#) from CUNY's Office of Human Resources Management

The current the administration, under Chancellor Matos Rodríguez, has gone even further to eroding job security:

- CUNY rushed to lay off thousands of adjuncts this spring even before cuts were applied.
- CUNY refused to use the CARES Act money to keep adjuncts employed. VC Sapienza's testimony left out the provision in the Act that stipulates keeping people employed. Instead, he just recited the less formal "guidance" from Betsy DeVos. What is more student-centered than keeping their instructors?
- CUNY failed to ensure adherence to the PSC agreement to protect adjuncts on health insurance and those eligible for three-year appointments.
- And now CUNY is stonewalling and not even providing the union with the names of those who have been laid off.

The PSC thanks the two Committees holding today's hearing for your deep support on labor issues and education issues at CUNY. We suggest that the Committees:

- Give CUNY a one-week deadline to produce the names of the adjuncts who were laid off in the spring and those whose assignments were reduced. The union wants to reach these former members and discuss ways we can support them—CUNY won't even give us the names.
- Demand that CUNY use \$30 million in CARES Act money now to put those adjuncts back on payroll, regardless of the pressure they are getting from the Governor's budget director, who has been installed on the CUNY Board.
- Demand an account of how Chancellor Matos Rodríguez held colleges to the June 30 agreement with the PSC on notification of adjuncts.
- Bargain with the union on the impact of changes in class size.
- Take a public stand; tell CUNY to stop providing a way to disguise the effect of cuts and instead demand that Albany implement revenue measures. Waiting and hoping for a stimulus bill is not enough.

CUNY must take a stand against the cuts Governor Cuomo has implemented. The CUNY administration should be the strongest advocate of keeping its budget whole, not the partner in finding ways to suggest that further cuts are sustainable. They are not. This is not the moment to stand down. It is the moment to stand up for the public university New York deserves.