

**Testimony of Jane Clark, Adjunct Lecturer
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York**

**Concerning Funding for Adjunct Health Insurance
In the CUNY Budget Request (Calendar Item 3.A.)**

21 November, 2011

Our administration has asked “Why is adjunct healthcare a local issue?”

It is local because it goes to the heart of how we treat our co-workers, our colleagues, and the kind of administration that we want to preside over. How we treat those with the least power is the mark of our compassion and humanity. It seems impossible to believe that, at the university level, we should even be seriously debating why we would want to insure the health of the majority of the faculty.

Adjuncts have always been on the front line. We do the heavy lifting in the remedial courses. We are usually the ones who teach, not just what it means to construct a sentence, but what it means to be in college. It is not an easy task, but it is a challenge we thrive on. We are the ones who must shape every class that enters this college, and many of us have spent decades refining this practice. We play a critical role because we provide the foundation of the entire academic experience. As such, it has always been a given that we would be extended the same basic rights as everyone who receives the students after the remedial stage is complete. It is inconceivable that the work that we do can be counted any less than the work of any other employee in this college, from cleaners, to cafeteria workers, to distinguished professors, and therefore inconceivable to me that “Adjunct” healthcare, alone, should be deemed unnecessary.

Let me emphasize that healthcare is basic human right, and it is correct that everyone should be able to get medical care when sick, as all lives are important, regardless of the work we perform. A job title should not determine whether or not we have access to medical treatment, but the fact that we are all suffer from our inherently flawed human condition. As a civilized society, especially in the field of education, we should be striving to make the human condition more bearable, not more difficult, and certainly college employees, whatever their status should not be exempt from this notion.

Yes, we are the front-line workers, and, thus we receive the students on the threshold of their college careers. An adjunct is a hybrid position which has not yet fully evolved and is not clearly understood. We teach more hours than most “full-time instructors,” yet we are perennially viewed as part time, and, as such, we have diminished status. Our lives are difficult.

We travel from campus to campus, but that does not decrease the value of our work, nor does it mean that we are immune to sickness or disease.

Furthermore, those who endure, through passion for students and commitment to providing education for everyone, are the products of a Darwinian system, in which one is only as good as his last semester. As a result of this intensely competitive process, over the years BMCC have culled the best instructors, for the most difficult job. We now have a core of adjuncts, who represent more than half the faculty, and who provide the foundation of every student's experience. If this core is lost, it is the student body that will suffer.

I believe that the administration, of any thriving community college, knows, better than most, how much the engine is driven by adjunct labor and what it would mean to have the engine constantly plagued with disease and sickness. It is, therefore, a practical measure to take care of the majority of the workforce, and it is the right and humane thing to take care of the people that make this college run.