



## TESTIMONY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY

### THE IMPACT OF THE 2006-07 STATE BUDGET ON NEW YORK'S PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEMS

New York State Assembly Standing Committee on  
Higher Education  
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First, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today.

I am a professor in the Media Studies Department at Queens College, where I have taught for almost thirty years. As in most departments at CUNY, the number of full-time teachers has dropped dramatically since the late 1970s, and only over the last five to eight years has the College been able to hire full-time professors once again.

My department has hired about 6 or 7 highly qualified professors in recent years. I believe we have perhaps the best Media Studies department in the greater New York City area, with excellent teachers dedicated to the students, extremely productive research output, high enrolments in classes, and on the cutting edge of new technology.

Yet half of these excellent colleagues are seeking positions at other universities. You need to know why that is happening, for all of these teachers wanted to come to CUNY, wanted to be in New York, love our students, and have friendly and supportive collegial relations.

One young Associate Professor, who came to Queens College from an executive position at NBC, was recently promoted with an excellent publication record, including work used by the Federal Communication Commission. As a single mother of a six-year-old daughter, she teaches in January, during the summer, and at NYU to make ends meet, with no parental leave or childcare provided by the University. She discovered that after waiting the normal one-year period before her promotion kicked in, she received no additional money for being promoted. None. Outraged and frustrated, she is already looking at three other universities, outside of New York, one of which asked her to apply for a position. As she put it, "if they are not going to reward me for my hard work with what I am worth, I want to be somewhere where they value my contributions."

Another Associate Professor graduated from Yale and has had prestigious fellowships from Princeton and NYU, and recently was honored by being named president of the most prestigious journal in our field, *Cinema Journal*, a position that would bring prestige to Queens College as well. Yet when she requested one course release from teaching – in order to have some time off from teaching to run the journal – she encountered incredible difficulty in getting that minimum support from the institution because it would cost Queens College several thousand dollars. While the release was ultimately approved, the resistance was just the latest cold water thrown on the academic success of this colleague, who has applied to at least five other universities.

A third young teacher, in her second year as a full time Assistant Professor, for whom I am a mentor, has already applied for other positions. The workload demands – number of courses, numbers of students, lack of teaching assistance grading – leave little time to pursue research, the most important single measure of the quality of an

institution. In addition, the College allows only \$400 per year to support scholarly work, which typically involves presenting research at conferences, meaning a hotel bill of hundreds of dollars plus often airplane travel, normally far in excess of \$400 for only one conference per year. Presenting and discussing research at conferences are an essential part of a professor's work.

The chair of my department, a distinguished, internationally known Full Professor, said it all boils down to one thing: "Money, money, money." The lack of money discourages the much trumpeted entrepreneurial initiatives throughout the university, short-circuiting this professor's plans for a new graduate program. Perhaps even more starkly, this distinguished scholar took on a second full-time job as department secretary when our wonderful and much-loved secretary tragically died in November. Yet when he asked for one course of release time for the spring to have some time for his own research, which he told me he literally dreams about, the administration refused.

I don't believe the administration makes these insensitive decisions out of hostility to the faculty. The College administration has no money to make even these modest efforts at recognizing and properly rewarding its dedicated and hard-working faculty.

Yes, CUNY continues to function with highly trained and dedicated teachers. But if you care about the quality of the institution, you will realize that the quality of a university depends above all on the quality and commitment of the full-time faculty to the institution. At the current funding level, and I am telling you of only one small part, CUNY is discouraging its faculty at every rank, sowing frustration which is already driving its best hopes for the future elsewhere, ultimately showing a lack of respect for the hundreds of thousands of New York students who deserve a truly higher quality of higher education.

How can I tell any of the 90 applicants for our open position this year – a position open after a young mother fled CUNY for the University of Minnesota, furious at its lack of parental leave and pitiful support for research – how can I tell them that CUNY is the place for them to fulfill their academic career dreams? As my chair put it more derisively, "Come to CUNY. We do more with less." Everyone who works at CUNY understands that message too well. If you really want quality, fund it. If you want to stop the hemorrhage, fund CUNY.

Thank you.