

Open Letter of Commitment to Resist Cuts at CUNY: No Cuts, No Layoffs, No Class Size Increases, No Non-Reappointments

We are faculty and staff at the City University of New York, and proud members of our union, the Professional Staff Congress. Along with the union and across campuses and job titles we commit to standing firmly united against any austerity measures that further divest from public higher education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare longstanding structural inequalities that render the most vulnerable the most impacted, causing unprecedented physical, emotional, and economic hardship for the students, faculty, and staff of the university, many of whose families have been thrown into chaos due to layoffs, illness, or both. Precariously employed adjunct laborers, who teach 60% of CUNY classes, have fought poverty-level wages and virtually nonexistent job security for years preceding the current pandemic. Now, in response to a budgetary crisis brought on by state responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, of which New York City is currently the global epicenter, administrators are proposing preemptive cuts that would leave hundreds of adjuncts without jobs or healthcare, students with fewer course options in the fall, and already overcrowded classes even more bloated.

Such cuts can only be resisted through collective action. As members of a labor union we understand that an injury to one is an injury to all. We will strenuously defend the jobs of our fellow union members whenever management attempts to terminate or furlough them without due process or not to reappoint them for reasons that have only to do with budget and convenience. In particular, we recognize the limitations of lobbying tactics and commit to more militant strategies such as work actions and strikes in order to reverse the devastating effects of austerity, and will work in close solidarity with students to resist any and all further tuition increases and cuts to student services. As educational professionals, for Fall 2020 we recommend course caps be lowered proportionally and reflect best practices for online teaching, which means a cap of no more than 20 students per course. Course minimums should also be lowered to allow more courses at smaller class sizes to run. Such actions will mitigate job loss and loss of health insurance, and better foster



student engagement and continuity.

The City University of New York was founded on the principle of providing higher education to the working class population of New York City. In fact, Brooklyn College, Queens College, and Lehman College were founded in the midst of the Great Depression, arising from the historical recognition that moments of economic crisis require public investment, not austerity measures that foist the financial burden on the most marginal members of society. Since tuition was introduced to CUNY in the 70s—the same time the student body majority became students of color—it has grown to comprise the bulk of revenue for an institution meant to be publicly funded. CUNY has the potential to emerge from this crisis even stronger than it was before, but we can only build power through a broad coalition of faculty and staff who will categorically refuse any measure that weakens the strength of the whole.

We the undersigned fear the precedent that cuts establish for the future of New York’s public university and unequivocally oppose any measures that further weaken our students’ education and the integrity of our working conditions during and beyond the global health crisis.

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