

New Deal for CUNY

Concept Paper

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Elements of the New Deal for CUNY

1. Increase the ratio of full-time faculty to students and professionalize adjunct compensation.

No single factor is more important in student success and a university's academic stature than the student/faculty ratio. As a result of decades of inadequate public funding, the number of full-time faculty at CUNY has plummeted by more than 4,000 positions even as enrollment has soared. Full-time professors have been replaced by temporary, part-time instructors, adjuncts. Even tuition increases of more than 50 percent over the last ten years at both senior and community colleges have been insufficient to offset the loss of public funds.

New York cannot accept a substandard ratio of full-time faculty to students and unprofessional compensation for adjunct instructors. They hurt our students and they hurt our state. The New Deal for CUNY mandates public funding to lift the ratio of full-time faculty to undergraduate students and close the equity gap between full-time and part-time pro-rated salaries.

In 2003, both CUNY and SUNY maintained overall ratios of 43 full-time faculty members to 1,000 full-time-equivalent (FTE) students in the four-year colleges, a number already below national norms for public universities. By 2017 the ratio at SUNY had increased slightly, to 47, while at CUNY it dropped to 35. At certain colleges within both systems, however, the ratio is even lower. The New Deal for CUNY brings the ratio up to 65 full-time faculty members per 1,000 FTE students at both senior and community colleges of CUNY over the next five years.

A ratio of 65 full-time faculty members to 1,000 FTE students, or approximately 15 students to one full-time professor, would align CUNY with national averages. CUNY's current ratio of 35 full-time faculty to every 1,000 FTE students creates a student/faculty ratio of 1:29. The national average ratio of full-time faculty to FTE students, according to the federal government's National Center for Education Statistics, is 1:14. Thus there are nearly twice as many full-time faculty per student nationally as at CUNY.

That CUNY students, who face far greater academic and economic challenges than the average college student, have access to only half as much full-time faculty support as students nationally speaks volumes about New York's failure to invest adequately in their education and their lives. CUNY's location in New York City and powerful educational mission have enabled the University to attract exceptionally well-qualified adjunct faculty who are deeply committed to their students. But access to full-time faculty remains essential for student success. A major study by the National Bureau of Economic Research shows that institutional resources play a far greater role in student success than student preparation. Full-time

faculty are a critical resource. With the time and economic security a full-time tenured or tenure-track position provides, full-time faculty are in a unique position to invest in their students. As active researchers, professorial faculty also have institutional support for involving students in scholarly and scientific research and bringing the benefit of their own scholarly activities into the classroom.

Reaching the target of 65 full-time faculty to every 1,000 FTE students at CUNY will require hiring 5,000 new full-time faculty. The New Deal for CUNY mandates reaching that number over five years, through a mix of Assistant Professor and Lecturer positions. It calls for a combination of approaches to new hiring: national searches for research faculty; targeted searches and recruitment of faculty from underrepresented racial, ethnic and gender groups; conversion of existing part-time positions for current adjuncts into full-time Lecturer positions; and additional laboratory technician staffing in the physical sciences.

The legislation provides for a concerted national hiring campaign to attract full-time faculty from underrepresented groups. It also creates opportunities for long-serving adjuncts to assume full-time faculty positions at the appropriate faculty rank. As CUNY converts from a largely part-time faculty to a largely full-time faculty, the adjunct faculty who have developed expertise in working with CUNY students should have the opportunity to be hired in full-time positions.

CUNY has filled the massive hole in its core instructional budget by replacing thousands of stable full-time faculty positions with precarious, short-term adjunct positions. The University currently employs more than 12,000 adjunct faculty and only 7,500 full-time faculty. Despite the major gains in the current collective bargaining agreement between CUNY and the PSC, adjunct faculty positions are still not paid on the basis of equity with comparable full-time positions and often still lack the support a professor needs, such as an office, time to conduct research and professional working conditions. Students are shortchanged when adjunct faculty continue to be paid at unprofessional rates and cannot devote full time to their work at CUNY. Many still have to scramble for other part-time work and run from college to college cobbling together an income. Every faculty member who teaches CUNY students should be recruited, supported and compensated as a professional.

The replacement of full-time faculty with underpaid, contingent adjuncts is a national problem, and it systematically undermines both the quality of higher education and labor standards. It is not simply a matter of collective bargaining, however; it is a structural inequality built into CUNY's budget by the consistent failure of public funding to keep pace with enrollment. New York, long a leader on labor issues, should take the lead in undoing that structure. Inadequate academic staffing can no longer be the norm. New York should also call a halt to normalizing unequal conditions and unprofessional compensation for the adjunct faculty.

Because of the strides made in the most recent PSC-CUNY contract, the cost of professionalizing adjunct compensation at CUNY is substantially lower than it would have been in years past. An increased investment of \$127 million every year for five years would raise the ratio of full-time faculty to students, staff classrooms and laboratories, and professionalize adjunct compensation. The investment would transform academic staffing at CUNY and create a new model nationwide.

Senior college cost over five years: \$453 million

Community college cost over five years: \$183.5 million

Total cost over five years: \$636.5 million

Methodology: Cost of hiring 3,500 Assistant Professors and 1,500 Lecturers, plus fringe benefits, minus savings from replacement of adjunct appointment hours by full-time faculty appointment hours as full-time faculty are hired = \$ 461.5 million. Cost of increasing adjunct compensation to equity, on a pro-rated basis, with equivalent full-time faculty title = \$175 million, split 70/30 between senior and community colleges.

2. Reset the ratios of mental health counselors and academic advisors to students, in line with national standards.

CUNY students, perhaps more than any other college population in the country, bear stresses that make it extraordinarily difficult to stay in college, sometimes even to survive. More than 60 percent of CUNY undergraduates have family incomes under \$30,000 a year. 80 percent are people of color. 42 percent report food insecurity. Many are parents, and more than half work at least half-time. For thousands of CUNY students, every day is a struggle with poverty, hunger, racism, homelessness, low-wage work and parenting. For most CUNY students, the only available access to academic support or mental health counseling is within the University. That CUNY students absorb the stresses they do and nevertheless persist in their college education is testament to their hunger for knowledge and commitment to transforming their lives. They know what is at stake in earning a college degree.

Yet CUNY's ratio of mental health counselors to students falls dangerously below the national standard, a standard that assumes students with far fewer stresses and much more support. The International Accreditation of Counseling Services calls for a ratio of 1:1,000 mental health counselors to students. At CUNY, the ratio is closer to 1:2,700. The New Deal for CUNY would make a fundamental investment in students' success and survival by lifting the ratio of mental health counselors to students to 1:1,000 and maintaining at least that level.

The New Deal for CUNY also mandates public investment, again at the federal, state and city level, in academic advisers and other student support personnel. The Center for an Urban Future has recently recommended academic advisors on a ratio of 1 to 600 students. CUNY's own highly successful ASAP program attributes much of its success in doubling two-year graduation rates to its interventionist academic advising; ASAP is staffed with academic advisors on a ratio of 1:150. Especially for a student body where many are the first in their families to attend college and many thousands are newly arrived immigrants, hands-on academic advising can make the difference between graduating and dropping out. Limited access to advisors means that students often spend precious semesters in courses that do not contribute to their majors or fail to enroll in the required courses they need. For a relatively modest public investment, CUNY could provide every student with academic support and ensure that students get the maximal benefit from their efforts in college.

Senior college cost over five years: \$28 million

Community college cost over five years: \$ 12 million

Total cost over five years: \$40 million

Methodology: Two different counseling specialties are urgently needed at CUNY: mental health counselors and academic advisors. The two are distinct fields, each with special qualifications. The International Accreditation of Counseling Services sets a standard for clinical mental health counselors in colleges of 1:1,000 students. To reach the nationally recommended ratio of 1:1,000 mental health counselors to students, CUNY would need to add 125 mental health counseling positions, distributed between faculty and professional staff titles. Assuming a mix of Lecturer and HEO Associate, plus fringe benefits, the cost of increasing the ratio of mental health counselors CUNY-wide to the nationally approved level would be \$15 million. Using a median number of 250 new academic advising positions and other student support positions, the cost CUNY-wide of providing sufficient academic advising positions would be \$25 million. These costs were aggregated and then divided on a 70/30 split between senior and community colleges.

3. Make CUNY free: eliminate undergraduate tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students and replace tuition income with public funds.

For more than a century, CUNY led the national conversation about the right to a free college education. New York would not be the city and state it is today had CUNY not provided a way for each new wave of immigrants to receive a free, rigorous college education. Every one of CUNY's Nobel Laureates attended tuition-free. It is not an overstatement to say that there would be no healthcare industry, no fashion industry, no publishing industry, a diminished finance industry and a scarcity of public school teachers in New York City if not for CUNY's unmatched ability to offer new immigrants, the working class and the poor a chance to attend college free that they received nowhere else. And it is indisputable that New York would not be the gateway for successive generations of immigrants without access to free college.

Now, when the national conversation has shifted back to CUNY's original great idea of providing free college education to all, it is time for New York to define the national higher education agenda again. Nothing is more important in taking leadership than instituting genuinely free tuition. Reintroducing free tuition at CUNY would be especially powerful as a public investment in communities currently under attack because of rising racism, anti-Semitism and anti-immigrant bigotry. Free undergraduate tuition at CUNY would send an unmistakable message to the rest of the country that New York believes that "the children of the whole people," regardless of origin, race or citizenship status, should be educated together and with equal resources. What powers CUNY intellectually, despite its meager funding, is precisely the mix of students, with the subjugated knowledge and intellectual passion they bring to their work.

Even if the next president of the United States is elected on a platform of free tuition at public colleges, free tuition is unlikely to be achieved immediately or easily. New York can demonstrate right now that a new, progressive approach to college education is possible. CUNY is the right place to do it.

The New Deal for CUNY mandates that all tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students within specified time-frames for completion of degree be eliminated, and that the revenue to the colleges that would otherwise derive from tuition and fees be replaced annually by federal, state and city funds.

One model for achieving free tuition and fees would be to eliminate eligibility for TAP for CUNY undergraduates (annually \$332 million) and use the funding formerly provided through TAP to help to support free tuition for all, thus reducing the cost. Financial aid counselors at the colleges could be

retrained as academic advisors and other support personnel, further reducing costs. The legislation would mandate, however, that students who meet the income requirements would retain eligibility for federal Pell grants, enabling them to dedicate those funds to the heavy expenses of textbooks and other supports.

Senior college cost: \$660 million

Community college cost: \$136 million

Total cost: \$796 million

Operating Budget Costs of the New Deal for CUNY

Total senior college operating budget increase over five years: \$1.141 billion, approximately \$228 million additional per year in each of five years

Total community college operating budget increase over five years: \$331.5 million, approximately \$66.3 million additional per year in each of five years

Total CUNY operating budget increase over five years: \$1.472.5 billion

Capital Budget

Invest in capital renewal plan to address urgent issues of safety, accessibility, energy, capacity and maintenance of CUNY buildings.

The most visible sign of systematic inadequate funding of CUNY is the state of its physical plant. Any renewal of CUNY must address the degraded and sometimes dangerous conditions in its classrooms, libraries and laboratories.

While CUNY includes some important and beautiful new buildings, much of the physical plant is more than fifty years old. Decades of underinvestment have meant that these buildings have deteriorated and essential repairs have not been made. The result is massive overcrowding on many campuses, leaky roofs, broken plumbing, dangling ceiling tiles, dangerous pavements, failure to replace major electrical components, burst pipes, inadequate heating, cooling and ventilation, and many other hazards. Too often, the physical environment at CUNY hinders rather than supports teaching and learning. As they navigate around makeshift repairs in hallways, classrooms, libraries and bathrooms, students have to struggle to accomplish the ordinary activities of learning. All too often, especially at the campuses with high concentrations of the lowest-income students, the physical environment telegraphs the message that their studies—and their lives—do not matter.

As a diverse, public university in a progressive state and the largest city in the nation, CUNY should send a message about the importance of education, about sustainability in an urban environment, and about hope. Education is inherently about the future, and CUNY has the opportunity to contribute to mapping out a sustainable future, both by renewing the physical plant and by drawing on the expertise of its faculty on environmental science. CUNY could provide leadership on such urgent issues as how to upgrade buildings to meet emerging flood standards, how to promote the transition to renewable energy by using

the resources of CUNY's 300 city buildings, how to create models for a sustainable urban environment. The New Deal for CUNY mandates a five-year capital plan consistent with the University's capital plan that combines capital renewal and repair with new strategic initiatives, including technology upgrades and sustainability projects.

Senior college capital cost over five years: \$3.79 billion

Community college capital cost over five years: \$1.41 billion

Total capital budget increase over five years: \$5.2 billion