

March 9, 2001 Legislative Hearings on Adjunct Labor
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Contrary, perhaps, to intuition and popular impression, there is no “typical” CUNY adjunct. The approximately 8,000 adjuncts range in age from 22 to 87! and have CUNY tenures (so to speak) ranging from one semester to 40 years. The median age of a CUNY adjunct is 50 years old—and that with only about 13% reporting that they are retired from another job. More than half are married. Three-quarters identify themselves as White, with Blacks, Latinos and Asians combining for a little over 20% of the adjunct workforce. The gender breakdown reflects that of the general population—i.e. slightly more than half are women. Approximately a quarter hold doctorates, and many more hold terminal masters degrees. In practice, on average, the CUNY adjunct teaches a course load roughly comparable to her full-time colleagues. On average she makes under \$9000 per year for her enormous efforts. Hundreds of CUNY adjuncts are forced, by necessity, to teach at more than one CUNY campus, and perhaps a quarter of them teach outside CUNY as well. More than 40% report that they only adjunct or that adjuncting is one of several part-time jobs. Nearly a third report that they have no office space at all, and nearly half reported having access only to a common room (in which to prepare for class, hold *confidential* meetings with students, relax, etc.). Only a quarter reported having computer access on campus. The average number of students in a CUNY adjunct’s class is 40! That’s an average; it includes the large “super-sections” in many 101-level courses. On average CUNY adjuncts have minimal input regarding the numbers and types of courses they teach, and of the days and times they will work, often learning their schedules just days (or *hours*) before the start of classes. More than a third of CUNY adjuncts reported maintaining office hours, despite not being paid for them. At least 8% of CUNY adjuncts live without health insurance. To the limited extent she may be defined, this is the “typical” CUNY adjunct.

Let me tell you a brief story of one CUNY adjunct who does not fit this “profile,” a colleague of ours from LaGuardia Community College. Linda Morales is a woman in her late thirties. She was born in Peru, and, after living for a time in Argentina, she moved to New York City nearly 20 years ago. Linda is fluent in four languages, and has published poetry in two of them, including English. She is a singer. Since earning her BA from Hunter College, Linda has worked as a journalist, a

newspaper and magazine correspondent, and has co-hosted and produced a daily radio program here in the City. Her desire to teach led her first to jobs at Renaissance School and the New York Language Center. Three years ago she began working at LaGuardia. Teaching, she told me, provides her the motivation for her writing, her poetry and short stories; it energizes her. For the first 37 (or so) years of her life, Linda Morales was never sick—not surprising considering she never smoked or drank, and has spent much of her adult life a vegetarian. And then, suddenly, she *was* sick. Her lymphoma was diagnosed by doctors in Peru, because the New York City medical establishment had given her the run-around. The round-trip alone almost killed her. But she returned to New York, to her mother, her cat and her work in CUNY. A month or so into the Fall 2000 semester, however, Linda was too sick to continue, and had to leave LaGuardia. When she did, of course, she lost not only her income, but her health insurance as well. And because current Disability Insurance laws exempt educational institutions from mandatory coverage, and since CUNY self-insures, Linda was left without Disability Insurance to cover her lost wages, and thus the means to pay her mounting medical bills. She has been forced to accept Medicaid from New York City, though this does not cover her dosage of Neupogen (required to help regenerate her white blood cells) which costs \$500 *per pill* for the 10 pills she requires after each chemo session. For years, Linda Morales has devoted her life to the education of the children and adults of New York City. Let New York not turn its back on her at this critical moment in her young life.

The current Disability Insurance laws *must* be amended to eliminate the exemption of educational institutions from mandatory coverage for all employees. We challenge the New York Legislature to lead the way, boldly, in this. Write laws that protect this large, vulnerable, greatly exploited, highly dedicated group of academic employees.

Disability Insurance is not the only legislative concern, however, of adjuncts. Currently, adjuncts in New York State are not permitted to collect Unemployment Insurance during the summer months or between semesters if they are provided with “reasonable assurance” of employment. For years, CUNY has been using this criterion as the means for denying adjunct claims, and recovering payments already made. In practice, however, the highly conditional letters of contingent employment “offers” have provided *far less than* “reasonable assurance” of a job. In fact, adjuncts who have received these appointment letters are quite frequently not given schedules,

for any number of reasons. Already grossly underpaid, and often leading fractured lives requiring them to bounce between several jobs in order to eke out a living, and often denied summer and inter-session teaching, adjuncts must be able to depend on the Unemployment System to help them through this “down” time, during which they often do much of their scholarship, writing, and reading.

In 1989, the California Legislature (following the case of *Cervisi v. Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board*), wrote laws guaranteeing adjuncts “unemployment compensation for periods between semesters, including summer breaks,” determining that their similarly highly contingent employment “offers” did not provide “reasonable assurance” of employment. We ask the New York Legislature to follow this excellent model, and write similar laws protecting this State’s great adjunct faculty.

In Unemployment Insurance, New York needs to follow California’s progressive model. In Disability Insurance, New York must lead. Linda Morales must not simply be a symbol of institutional, bureaucratic disregard for the welfare of the individual, especially of those individuals living at the margins. Imagine yourself in her shoes, and let her case motivate changes ensuring the end to such horrible situations. I believe Linda Morales will survive her ordeal with lymphoma. I hope—and Linda joins me in this—that no CUNY (or any other New York State) employee henceforth will *ever* have to feel so completely abandoned at her moment of greatest need. As she wrote in a LaGuardia newsletter: “Thank you for allowing me to express my appreciation . . . because this effort has once more reinforced my faith in human empathy and solidarity—the main reason I love being a teacher. This story is not to be forgotten. This is what the world should be like. I thank God for having been the lucky one to experience it. This is the way we can turn the worst into the best, the way to turn the world around from darkness into light.”

The New York City community needs CUNY. CUNY needs the New York legislature. Please support the 12% increase in CUNY funding. Please write legislation ensuring unemployment insurance provisions for adjunct faculty during the summers and between sessions. And *please* lift the exemption of educational institutions from the Disability Insurance laws. Thank you.