

Testimony of Arthurine DeSola
Secretary of the Professional Staff Congress
Before the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York
Concerning the University Budget Request for FY 2015-2016 as it
Relates to the PSC-CUNY Collective Bargaining Agreement
(Calendar Item 3.F.)

24 November, 2014

Good afternoon, members of the Board of Trustees. My name is Arthurine DeSola, and I have worked at CUNY for 37 years—at five colleges. I am currently a HEO Assistant and the elected Secretary of the PSC. I am speaking today on Calendar Item 3F, the CUNY Budget Request, and in support of including the modest funding that would be required to provide a collectively bargained system of professional advancement for Higher Education Officer series employees.

You may not know us, the HEOs, as well as you know the faculty. We are the 4,000 women and men—predominantly women and men of color—who provide vital student services and the administrative expertise that supports countless CUNY programs. There would be no ASAP without HEOs, there would be no Financial Aid counseling without HEOs, there would be no Social History Project or continuing education courses and professional programs without the work HEOs do.

Yet HEOs are profoundly demoralized and alienated. In the last few years we have seen a hasty and ill-considered effort to change our time-and-leave reporting as well as the disastrous introduction of CUNYfirst. But the overriding reasons for the low morale I hear about from HEOs across the University are two, both related to the contract and its budget implications: the urgent need for a raise and the equally urgent need for a system of professional advancement.

Against a backdrop of economic insecurity during the past four-and-a-half years, many members who are members of the Higher Education Officer series experienced a myriad of problems that included: personal illness; rent increases; loss of a home due to Super Storm Sandy; a decrease in family income due to the employment retrenchment of a spouse; the illness of their children. For some members, the enrollment of a child in an after-school program did not materialize due to a parent's lack of tuition funds.

Consider Kathy Koutsis, the HEO who runs the day-to-day operations of the enormously successful—and profitable—Master's in Liberal Studies program at the Graduate Center. Ms. Koutsis is an Assistant to HEO, the lowest-paid HEO title, and she has been at the top step of that title for seven years. No raise, no step increase, nowhere to go. Yet in the past eight years, the number of students in her program has increased from 96 to 306. And her responsibilities to each student are unchanged. Ms. Koutsis is the heart of that program. The professors in charge change over time, but Kathy makes the program work.

But because CUNY relies on a rigid classification system, Kathy cannot be promoted. She continues to work with integrity in her job because she loves CUNY; she was a graduate of Hunter High School herself. But CUNY is in danger of losing people like Kathy if the University continues to fail to recognize the need for an additional system of HEO advancement.

I call on you today to address the urgent cry from HEOs across the University for the professionalism and respect we deserve. CUNY relies on us to do professional work; CUNY should treat us as professionals. That means adding a system that recognizes and rewards us when our work expands significantly and our job performance redefines our jobs.