

Testimony of Robert Farrell, Assistant Professor
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 evening. My name is Robert Farrell and I'm an Assistant Professor in the Library Department at Lehman College. I'm speaking in reference to the University Budget Request (Calendar Item 3. F.) and in support of a budget that funds annual leave parity for Librarians.

When we are talking about "annual leave" we are talking about research opportunities.

There are those in the CUNY administration who will tell you that there is a mechanism to ensure that librarians can engage in scholarly activities, something called "Professional Reassignment." As the statistics by my colleague Jill Cirasella outlined make clear, it is a broken mechanism that has become a problematic paradigm.

The "Professional Reassignment" was put forward in 1978 as a temporary stop-gap to redress in a small way the annual leave disparity between library faculty and all others. In itself, it represents yet another acknowledgment by the University that library faculty need time to conduct research and engage in the kinds of professional development opportunities afforded to faculty in other disciplines.

It has been modified over the years becoming, in 2006, a funded 5-week leave available to 50 librarians per year by application. According to CUPS data, between Spring 2009 and Spring 2014, 41 library professional reassignment leaves have been taken, less than one year's worth of

leaves over five years! Despite 35 years of tinkering, it is still hardly used at all for a number of reasons.

First, Chief Librarians must make a budgetary request to cover any librarian on Reassignment Leave. But because Chiefs serve in their position by appointment and not departmental election, their personal success depends on maintaining the favor of both the college President and Provost. They are thereby often reluctant to request the contractually mandated funds, thus creating a disincentive within their departments to apply for the leave.

And even if funds are requested and received, because the Professional Reassignments are limited in number—there are 250 library faculty across CUNY and only 50 leaves—faculty workload is necessarily shifted to those who do not receive the leave, while specialized workload is left undone. Faculty applying for reassignment are put into the awkward position of pursuing their the research required for tenure and promotion while simultaneously alienating those whose support they need for professional advancement later down the line.

Administrators will continue to suggest that the current Professional Reassignment structure is sound and that all that is needed are some minor improvements to this Baroque mechanism, either in review of applications or in administration of funds. But we know after 35 years that this will not work in practice. Due to their scarcity, there will be “haves” and “have nots” and the problem will continue. The solution is simple: Annual leave parity for all library faculty.