

**Testimony of J. Paul Narkunas, Associate Professor of English
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

My name is Paul Narkunas, and I am an Associate Professor of English at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. I'm speaking in reference to the University Budget Request (Calendar Item 3. F), and in support of a CUNY budget that includes funding for contractual salary increases, and for improved working, teaching and learning conditions at CUNY.

CUNY's already underserved students--forty percent of whom come from families with a household income of under \$20,000—come to college with aspirations of upper mobility and a belief in a meritocratic order. Their dreams are deferred, however, when educational priorities are met by stagnant budgets, a generalized climate of enforced austerity, and a shift from public investment in higher education to the individualization of costs, resulting in higher tuitions for them. Investing in CUNY offers a unique opportunity to reenergize our downtrodden public sector to counter what I call “trickle-down responsibility” that affects students and faculty alike.

Trickle-down economics claims that lower tax rates drive production and capital investment “trickles down” to the less fortunate. In practice, the less fortunate have been denied the promised capital investment and been trickled upon with incomparable risks and responsibilities. With “trickle-down responsibilities” society outsources its duties and obligations to individuals, and demands that they assume personal responsibility for structural reforms that may also institutionalize massive societal inequality. Unlike trickle-down economics, trickle-down responsibilities actually do transfer down to those on the lower end of the economic rung, and we see this firsthand at CUNY.

As a CUNY faculty member I can speak to how our working conditions are our student's learning conditions. Yet, I also have seen how our student's often impoverished learning conditions also dramatically affect our work lives. At John Jay College, "[n]early 60% of those who apply for financial aid come from families designated 'low income,' meaning the family income is less than 200% of the poverty level." They suffer from the diminished opportunities of stultifying poverty and underfunded schools, and frequently have to make up for lost learning. Students therefore take on not only the personal responsibility of higher tuitions, but also greater responsibilities building literacy, math, and analytic skills so that they can compete with students from NYU, Columbia and Princeton. At the same time, they often work full-time while attending school and supporting their own families.

Faculty, as the eyes and ears of the college, can tell you how essential it is for students to receive personal attention in their written and oral feedback, exposure to a diversity of ideas and skills they need to succeed, as well as constant motivation and advisement, given their overextended and challenging lives. In the final analysis, the core product of higher education is teaching, and that begins and ends with a faculty member before a group of students in a classroom. We assume this responsibility every day in the classroom not only because it is our job, but because we have inherited all the broken promises of their education.

Please do the just thing and allow pay increases for full-time faculty that are not only pegged to the inflation and consumer price indices, but also address the burgeoning responsibilities we bear along with our students. As we witness a commitment of hundreds of millions of dollars to capital investment in technological and organizational disruption at CUNY with CUNYFIRST and Digital CUNY, let's see the same commitment to CUNY's human capital, our students, as well as your faculty, HEOs, and CLT employees. Invest in CUNY's future, and plug the hole of trickle-down responsibility with a fair contract that will benefit faculty and students alike.