

Testimony of Marcia Newfield, Adjunct Lecturer
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

I am Marcia Newfield. I am speaking to Item 3F, CUNY's Budget Request, on the need for a budget that includes funds for significant contractual salary increases for adjuncts. I have been working as an adjunct at CUNY at BMCC in the English Department for 26 years. I am also a union activist—Vice President for Part-time Personnel (14,000 of us), adjunct grievance counselor, and member of the union bargaining team.

As grievance counselor, I hear so many stories of people, adjuncts, struggling to make ends meet. Even when we teach a full load of 15 contact hours per semester, which most of us don't, we earn less than \$30,000 a year. Moreover, our classes may be cancelled at any time. There is no job security, no payment for cancellation of classes. We earn a few dollars more than food stamps allow and we have trouble collecting unemployment insurance even though we are seasonal workers.

A common response to this hardship is to blame us. The refrain is "Well, you chose this work, you knew what you were getting into. It's temporary, and it doesn't matter if you have worked for decades at one or another school. It doesn't matter that you have advanced degrees; it doesn't matter that you care about your students and hang in there even if the class is too large to give needed individual attention. It doesn't matter if you can't afford to retire."

Well, ladies and gentlemen of the Trustees, you argue that you are the final arbiters of the health of the university, its caretakers. I ask you, is this the model you want to present to our students? To our society? Work hard, attain advanced degrees and adjust to poverty?

True, that may be the new normal, but just as the founders of the university took the risk in 1847 to imagine that the children of workers could get a chance at higher education, can't you imagine a way to pay college teachers a living wage, give them working conditions that enhance their mission, and give them opportunity to develop their potential?

I think you can if you want to.