

**Testimony of Felipe Pimentel, Ph.D., 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

**Why we need higher salaries and a reduction of our teaching load
at CUNY community colleges**

I have been associated with CUNY for a long time. I earned my Ph.D. at the CUNY Graduate Center and I have been an instructor at this great public university since the mid-1980s; first as an adjunct at several colleges, next as a full-time substitute faculty member at Lehman and Hunter, and since 2004 as a full-time faculty member at Hostos Community College. I am stating all this to stress that I have a strong commitment to CUNY, its students and its mission of providing access to high-quality college education to the NYC students who come to our institution seeking a better future and a more productive life.

I am speaking today on Item 3F, the CUNY Budget Request, and in support of a budget that includes collectively bargained funds to provide for higher salaries and a more reasonable teaching load.

Teaching students from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds has been a big challenge and it is a big responsibility that I take on every day. As you know, CUNY has been underfunded for many years and we don't have all the resources we need to properly educate our students. In general, at most CUNY community colleges we teach overcrowded classes of 40 students (sometimes more) in which we have a significant number of students who need systematic academic mentoring and individualized attention—which, given the high teaching

load of 27 credit hours per year, faculty are unable to fully undertake. In addition to the basic teaching responsibilities that we have to fulfill, there are many other work-related expectations like committee work, advisement and guidance of students and an increasing amount of time that should be dedicated to research and publications. All of these things, together, have increased the amount of work that we are expected to do in our professional lives. In that sense, one of the key demands that our union has presented to the university is for a reduction of teaching load across the university by at least 3-credit hours per academic year. My impression—as a community college faculty member—is that for us at the community colleges, this is one of the most important demands that we have put on the table. If we can achieve a reduction of one 3-credit class per year in the new contract, we will have more time to work with students and more time to fulfill the research and publication expectations that we face in order to gain tenure or be promoted in the professorial ranks. At present, the teaching load that we have is too high to do all these things really well. Furthermore, CUNY wants us to invest more time working with students and work harder to increase student graduation and retention rates. We want to achieve these and other university goals. However, the demanding workload that we have to undertake every semester does not help us to move in that direction in an effective way.

The other issue that I want to address in this brief intervention is the demand for more competitive salaries and better economic incentives for the faculty teaching at CUNY community colleges. In general, starting salaries at community colleges are lower than what faculty is paid at senior colleges when faculty start teaching at CUNY. When I was hired at Hostos in 2004, my starting salary was terribly low (about \$10,000 less than what, on average, newly hired assistant professors were offered at CUNY senior colleges). Even though I had another offer from a small private college in upstate NY, I decided to stay at CUNY—and I don't regret my decision, since I wanted to teach at this public university. As you probably know, we are losing faculty every year because of our non-competitive salaries and heavy workload. It is sad that after investing so many resources and so much time in recruiting these new faculty members, we cannot keep a significant number of them who are leaving CUNY for other jobs. I don't need to say that living in NYC requires a lot of money since the cost of living is much higher than in most cities in the US. Regrettably, faculty salaries at CUNY have not significantly increased in recent years and the faculty is struggling to get by with shrinking

economic means. We cannot afford to live in NYC with the non-competitive salaries that we are being paid. We need a new contract with real economic gains and higher salaries for the faculty and staff. We cannot accept an economic offer that would not even keep with inflation—especially in a city where inflation is higher than in most cities in the US.

To summarize, the two most important demands that we want in our contract, especially from the perspective of community college faculty, are real gains in our economic compensation and a reduction of the current teaching load for fulltime faculty of at least one 3 credit class per academic year.

Thanks for your attention.