

**Testimony of Sigmund Shen, Associate 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**

*Testimony for Board of Trustees open hearing, Monday November 24, 2014*

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I am speaking in reference to Item 3F, CUNY's Budget Request, and in support of a budget that provides funding for a reasonable teaching load. A slower pace and more regular breaks from work are important for memory, attention span, creativity, productivity, and mental and physical health and safety. At CUNY, overwork is a terrible problem, the science warns us of the consequences.

Cody Delistraty, writing in the *Atlantic*, noted that "length of work and quality of work at a certain point become inversely. At some point, [...] the more you work, the less productive you become. [...] K. [...] Ericsson, a professor of psychology at Florida State, [...] found that the amount of time successful musicians spent practicing [...] was [...] a mere 90 minutes per day. [...] the most successful [took] breaks during practice when they grew tired or stressed. [...] Even Henry Ford knew the problem with overwork when he cut his employees' schedules from 48-hour weeks [...]. [Ford] believed that working more than 40 hours a week had been causing his employees to make many errors."

Tony Schwartz, a consultant to corporate management at Apple, Google, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, and Ford Motors, wrote in the *New York Times* in 2013 that "multidisciplinary research shows

that [...] longer sleep hours, [and] more time away from the office and longer, more frequent vacations — boosts productivity, job performance and [...] health. [...] A recent Harvard study,” he writes, “estimated that sleep deprivation costs American companies \$63.2 billion a year in lost productivity. [...] Stanford researcher Cheri Mah found that [...] basketball players [who slept] 10 hours a night, [...] improved [their performance in] free-throw and three-point shooting [...] by an average of 9 percent.”

Leslie Perlow of the Harvard Business School, who tracked employees of the Boston Consulting Group in an extensive, four-year long study, recommends that “companies should [...] encourage workers to banish all work-related tasks from their evenings.”

[At] the University of Wisconsin and the Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Science, researchers found that test subjects who were allowed the time for free reflection scored higher on memory tests.

Daniel [...] Levitin [...] director of the Laboratory for Music, Cognition and Expertise at McGill University, writes that ample time to engage in free reflection, enables the “flow of connections among disparate ideas and thoughts, [which] is responsible for our moments of greatest creativity and insight, when we’re able to solve problems that previously seemed unsolvable.”

Please imagine that we shifted our commitment away from quantity and toward quality, defining success not by the sheer number of students served per instructor, but by the quality and depth of education students receive. With that shift, faculty can have the time to care about each student, understand his or her level of preparation, and find ways of reaching that individual.

Our complicity in the American culture of overwork is pulling our students into the same cycle, creating an environment of a hospital emergency room, and training them to be more machinelike, the opposite of a university’s social role. We don’t believe we should be forced to choose between salary raises and workload reduction. The purpose of a salary is to support quality of work. Our commitment to that quality is being sabotaged by the culture of overwork.

Please make the choice to commit funding for a reasonable teaching load to protect our ability to give our students the help they need and the instruction they deserve.