

**TESTIMONY OF DAVID GERWIN,
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BEFORE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

October 16, 2017

Queens College has endured budget cuts of 2-3% in 2015-16 and 2016-17, and about 1% in 2017-18, while labor costs that Governor Cuomo has negotiated or even called for increase, as do the costs of keeping the lights on or the roofs from leaking. These costs are not fully funded by state appropriations to CUNY. The NYS Assembly and Senate have, nearly unanimously, passed Maintenance of Effort legislation that would mandate, simply, that the state allocations for CUNY and SUNY keep pace with fixed cost increases, such as labor and utilities. The CUNY Board of Trustees needs to speak out loudly and clearly in favor of the MOE.

Simultaneously, the Governor has increased the dependence of senior colleges on tuition that he and the legislature have raised nearly every year. But the main student assistance program, TAP, no longer covers the full cost of the state mandated undergraduate tuition at senior colleges. In response, state policy is if students receive the full TAP allocation the college must accept that amount for tuition. The difference between the tuition revenue budgeted for each student, and the smaller amount that TPA covers, is now referred to as the TAP gap and costs Queens College millions of dollars each year. A funding mechanism that closed the gap between TAP and the mandated senior college tuition would go help considerably with our funding.

After these years of budget cuts, Queens College is in peril, but in ways that are not visible in simple ways to the naked eye – there is no sinkhole open in the middle of campus with students falling into a visible pit. But I want you to keep that image in mind, because the constant budget cuts have opened up many holes around campus and people are falling.

On Friday, August 25, the day after the semester started, we received a notice from the Provost that Reprographics, the Queens College printshop, could not get material ready on time for the fall semester. The Provost arranged for a copy machine to be placed in the dining hall to copy syllabi and other classroom materials. I spoke to staff at Repographics. The culprit is austerity, with broken or malfunctioning machines that do not work at all, or whose parts are not routinely replaced, so there are fewer and slower machines available. The result – students starting the semester without syllabi in an age when not everyone has gone fully digital. I have attached a copy of the notice.

The Psychology Department has 85%-90% adjunct taught courses. This means that even if you are an amazing student who should go on to a doctoral program, that odds are that you will never encounter a line faculty member who can pull you out, have the conversation, and write the recommendation, not

even once during your entire major. That department doesn't need some priority hires – if there is to be any balance between teaching and research, that department needs a Marshall plan.

The austerity survey that our union conducted very informally just at a meeting, whose results I'm including with my testimony, mentions a range of infrastructure needs. Physically, building and grounds is down to a handful of staff, so even cleaning toilets or changing lightbulbs is chancy, and most clocks were pulled out of my building, Powdermaker Hall, since no one could keep them displaying the correct time. We have a tech fee, and for a while it ensured that no computer was more than five years old, but then with budget cuts the tech fee now pays for staffing, and we have long waits reported at the help desk and to replace computers. As more items move from paper to programs, including admissions applications, grades, and administrative functions, there is less and less tech support to assist our faculty and staff, and this hurts our ability to review advise and enroll students.

We now routinely have HEOs working out of title and doing two jobs when someone retires or leaves. This creates an impossible workload, huge stress, and delays student services. Assistant or Associate Directors are doing the Directors job. This would be one thing if it happened for a month or two while there was a search, but these situations have lasted for a year or two. If the college finally decides to bring someone in from the outside it then asks the HEO who has been doing that job to train someone entirely new what would have been reasonable now feels unfair and demoralizing.

We have a few examples of how austerity directly destroys academic programs. In February 2016 the director of Field Placement for Secondary Education left, and a search was authorized, but frozen in May, and not authorized again until the October 2016 when another placement officer left and the two jobs were combined. As a result student teachers who would have been placed in May and June were still being placed in late September, jeopardizing student teaching, and hurting our program reputations. Too, the Clinical Professor who was supposed to work with cooperating teachers and forge new relationships with schools is spending the bulk of her time working on student teacher placements.

Over the summer a HEO in the graduate admissions office lacked the resources to continue manually changing the code on over 100 students in programs that combined initial teacher certification and a master's degree. This understaffing set off an avalanche – the registrar could not call these students "program completers" on their transcripts and the Teacher Certification Officer then would not recommend them for initial certification. This is a more complicated story about how to manage program codes, but a bureaucratic difficulty became, because of austerity, a student disaster in which students with job offers were refused initial certification, and called their state assembly, state Senate, and in once case NYS Congressional representatives. Why would anyone enroll in a program that withholds the promised teacher certification?

In another instance, a math education program was mistakenly told not to submit a rejoinder by last spring, and they have now missed their accreditation cycle and will be completely unaccredited. Losing national recognition also destroys programs and makes it harder for students to get hired. I'm told that this is just human error, but I can tell you that error was due to austerity. If you have one person responsible for submitting 45 initial certification program accreditation reports, an accreditation report

on the Masters and other advanced degrees, and overseeing the unit accreditation efforts – that person will inevitably make “mistakes.” To call them mistakes and not the predictable results of austerity is absurd. The budget cuts are so bad that they have seeped into the entire college culture.

Someone ordering desks for the library ordered chairs that just couldn't bear up under the weight of students and their books. They lasted a matter of weeks. We could not tell if someone gave the person who ordered those desks an impossibly low budget, or if the constant state of fiscal crisis and the inability to get purchases approved led a person who might have been allowed to spend enough money to buy appropriate desks to just automatically seek out such a cheap price that the library received low quality furniture that immediately needed replacement. That is austerity – we cannot even tell anymore what was not approved because of the budget, and what necessary item people do not even dream they can request or purchase.

These are details. The big picture is that, in the current climate of forced austerity, Queens College faculty and staff are losing our ability to carry out a dual mission of conducting research while also teaching the kind of classes that educate our students for active citizenship in a complex world that requires them to understand the science behind crisper or global warming, the basic statistics in tax policy or choices about health care, an appreciation for arts and literature and poetry that makes life rich and humane, and in New York City is also a significant industry. Faculty do not want to choose between research and teaching, or unable to participate in service. HEOs do not want to leave the office each day with a stack of unmet student or faculty requests piling up unanswered on their desks.

We need you, the Trustees of our university, to stand up for CUNY. End the TAP gap. Call upon Cuomo to sign the Maintenance of Effort legislation. CUNY needs sustainable funding levels, not starvation.

PSC/CUNY QUEENS COLLEGE

AUSTERITY SURVEY

The PSC Executive Committee would like to hear from you!

We have been working with severe staff shortages in every area of the College in addition to a lack of resources for some time making our jobs even more difficult and undermining our ability to serve our students. Please help us provide the administration with specific details so as to meet some of the students' and workers' most basic needs.

Office of Information Technology

How have staff shortages in OIT affected your department, program or office and your ability to serve your students?

- Help Desk understaffed and slow to answer telephones (5X)
- Long delay getting computers fixed or replaced (4X)
- Software (especially SmartBoard) should be updated when classroom is NOT in use (3X)
- Need training in applications (CUNYFirst, Tableau, Chalk&Wire) and common procedures (3X)
- Students wait longer for services such as One-Stop
- Need greater support for department websites
- Need 24/7 support for hybrid/online courses
- Professors must provide their own ink cartridges; paper and other office supplies are scarce
- Print-copy center in library often not staffed
- Computer classrooms are slow to get scheduled

Building and Grounds

How have staff shortages in B&G affected your department, program or office and your ability to serve your students?

- Problems with regulating heating and cooling (4X)
- Toilets don't flush, faucets leak; bathrooms closed (3X)
- Burnt-out bulbs and ballasts take too long to replace (2X)
- Broken or cracked windows not fixed (2X)
- Routine non-emergency plumbing problems do not get fixed
- Ventilation duct filters are not replaced (Powdermaker)
- Short in equipment blows circuit breaker, work order from January 2016 still not filled
- Wait for service is very long, whether to fix a light or exterminate ants
- Electrical repairs can take over a year, while ceiling is left open
- Open ceiling tiles
- Clocks not accurate
- Flooded parking

Custodial Services

How have staff shortages in Custodial Services affected your department, program or office and your ability to serve your students?

- Bathrooms not cleaned (3X)
- No toilet paper or soap in bathrooms
- Classrooms not cleaned
- Heavily trafficked spaces like the library need cleaning more often
- Staff unable to keep up with cleaning
- Staff moved from building to building
- Shortage of supervisors

Human Resources

How have staff shortages in HR affected your department, program or office and your ability to serve your students?

- Personnel turnover and lack of trained staff
- Hiring justifications and approvals are slow and arbitrary
- ePAFs do not get completely processed to Payroll (2X)
- ePAFs get stuck in Payroll leading to delays in accessing PRAssist and getting paid
- Graduation approvals take too long to process
- HR records frequently inaccurate, staff slow to respond to queries or cannot respond at all

Departments

How have staff shortages in your department affected your department and your ability to serve your students?

- Limited office supplies (All), especially dry-erase markers and erasers
- Anthropology: Teaching materials not replaced, need video materials, need up-to-date video equipment and AppleTV interface for classrooms; need better WiFi coverage in classrooms
- EES: Some Staples supplies no longer available; old photocopiers break down; need more full-time faculty for upper level courses
- Education: Lack of training in and support for administrative responsibilities
- Library: Staff shortages, reduced hours of service, reduced resources for students; no replacements for retired full-time faculty; shortages of supplies to support basic library workflow

Miscellaneous

- Textbooks (especially expensive) no longer available for loan at library

Survey date Wednesday 26 April 2017