

**TESTIMONY OF GLENN PETERSEN,
PROFESSOR OF ANTHROPOLOGY, BARUCH COLLEGE**

BEFORE THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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I am Glenn Petersen, a professor of anthropology at Baruch College and the Graduate Center. I've been at Baruch since 1977 and headed my department for twenty years.

When I was a young man fighting in Vietnam, we used an expression to explain why we'd done really stupid or misguided things: "It seemed like a good idea at the time." The Excelsior Program certainly sounds like a good idea, and we all hope that it turns out to be one, but without action to support it, it's going to prove painful for many of our students.

Unless the Trustees take effective action in Albany, this program is going to exacerbate longstanding problems here at Baruch. Several of our business programs are so overtaxed that they are unable to serve all the students who want to enroll in them, or even those who are enrolled. We cannot not provide enough sections of key courses to accommodate all the students who need them. And we impose artificial barriers like forced grading curves to limit the numbers of students able to enroll. As a result, many students are unable to complete their four-year degrees in four years. Some have to wait far too long to take required courses; others find that they have to change their majors in order to graduate.

You will recall that Excelsior requires students to graduate in four years and to take 30 credits a year. Given that Baruch students already find this to be an impossibility under current conditions, this new program will mount new obstructions; it will not simply increase enrollments, but will increase the number of students unable to complete their studies in four years. And this means, of course, that they're going to face significant financial penalties. None of us wants to see this.

The building we are in now was designed to be the primary classroom facility for a Baruch College that enrolled 14,000 students. Enrollments are now over 17,000 (an increase of more than 20 percent), and will continue to rise. We've long outpaced the space available. We simply can't teach more students, or add more sections of high-demand courses. The same goes for faculty numbers.

Nevertheless, Excelsior is bringing us more and more students who must complete their studies in the impossible span of four years. In its consequences, if not in intent, this is bait and switch. Although I haven't seen data from the rest of CUNY, long experience tells me that structural problems of this sort are rarely limited to a single campus.

The Trustees must seriously rethink CUNY's allocation of faculty lines and space if we are to avoid perpetuating this fraud upon students who have come here in good faith.

Most urgently, though, you must convince the state government to fund its Maintenance of Effort commitments.