

April 15, 2024

Dr. Karol V. Mason, President, John Jay College
Dr. Félix V. Matos Rodríguez, Chancellor, City University of New York

Dear President Mason and Chancellor Matos Rodríguez:

I am writing on behalf of the [Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee](#). Our charge is to defend academic freedom as a professional and [contractual right](#) of all CUNY professional staff. Academic freedom is grounded in the faculty or staff member's qualifications for the position as reviewed by his/her peers. It consists of the freedom to teach, research, write, and to speak in our capacity as citizens without restraint by the administration.

We write to express our deep concern regarding the non-reappointment of Professor Danny Shaw, a long-time adjunct faculty member in the Latin American and Latinx Studies Program and a Senior Research Fellow at the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, who has been teaching at John Jay since 2007. It has been reported to our committee that President Mason actively intervened in the reappointment process, calling for Professor Shaw to not be reappointed based on his social media activity. While we are anxious to receive further information about the process by which Professor Shaw was non-reappointed, if it is the case that President Mason interfered with the process (as she has subsequently publicly stated), this is a clear contractual violation, not to mention a clear violation of faculty governance, and must be addressed and reversed immediately. Furthermore, if the decision to not reappoint Professor Shaw was influenced by the nature of his social media posts in any way, we consider this to be a violation of his academic freedom.

[Contractually](#), reappointment for part-time faculty members is predominantly based on teaching performance as assessed through the peer observation process. Professor Shaw is by all accounts a well-regarded instructor who has consistently received strong peer observations and student evaluations and was recently nominated for a teaching award, so his sudden non-reappointment after 17 years of teaching at John Jay raises serious questions. This is especially true given that, over the past several months, Professor Shaw, like other CUNY faculty members, has been targeted by right-wing organizations who have carried on a campaign calling for him to be fired. In [a series of letters](#) which we have written to protest violations of academic freedom by CUNY management on several campuses, we have noted a disturbing pattern in which campus administrators have consistently bowed to pressure from outside political organizations rather than upholding the right to academic freedom and free expression on their campuses. We fear that this may be the latest—and, given that it has led to the non-reappointment of a faculty member, the most serious—example of this pattern.

It goes without saying that management has no right to arbitrarily demand the non-reappointment of faculty members, nor the right to pressure departmental chairs or Personnel and Budget

Committees to follow their dictates regarding appointment and reappointment decisions. Therefore, we demand a full accounting of the circumstances regarding Professor Shaw's non-reappointment, and if pressure from President Mason, or any other member of John Jay management, played any role in the decision not to reappoint him, we demand that this decision be immediately reversed. We support Professor Shaw in his efforts for redress. We request a meaningful response to this letter and are open to hearing whatever information John Jay management can provide that will shed light on this matter. We look forward to your immediate response.

PLEASE ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT OF THIS LETTER VIA EMAIL.

Sincerely,

Professor Anthony Alessandrini, Chair

On behalf of the Professional Staff Congress Academic Freedom Committee

CC: PSC-CUNY Principal Officers and Executive Committee Members

Professor Douglas Medina, Chair, University Faculty Senate Academic Freedom Committee

Ari Paul, *Clarion* Editor

Professor Danny Shaw