

# Testimony of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY

On the Statewide Plan for Higher Education 2012 – 2020  
New York State Board of Regents Public Hearings #1

Delivered by Dr. Steve London, PSC First Vice President  
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Good morning Chancellor Tisch, Regent Bendit, other members of the Regents of the University, Commissioner King, and members of the Commissioner's staff. I am Steve London, First Vice President of the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents more than 25,000 faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York. It is an honor to represent them and a pleasure to be here today testifying on their behalf.

Planning for New York State's higher education for the next eight years is, needless to say, an important undertaking. The document before us, however, is not a planning document per se, but mainly an abbreviated statement of current policies, programs, and concerns. As such, it names some important concerns, it relates those concerns to existing programs and policies by higher education sector, and it comments on the success of some valuable programs and policies.

What it doesn't do is make a comprehensive assessment of the state of higher education in New York, evaluate policies, programs and institutions, suggest changes of course, and plan how necessary resources will be acquired and allocated to shape the needed changes over the next eight years. Indeed, there is the unstated assumption that the existing higher education institutions, policies, and programs will address the basic needs of New York for the foreseeable future.

So I will look at this document for what it is and comment on the major policy and programmatic initiatives it outlines and suggest additional areas for development over the next eight years.

## **The Need for More Resources**

The "Statewide Plan" judges as successful important programs that meet the Regents' concerns, e.g. College Now, HEOP, SEEK, Liberty Partnerships, the Science and Technology Entry Program, or the Collegiate Science and Technology

Entry Program. All these programs have one thing in common. They are resource-rich programs and rely on high faculty-student ratios and robust academic support. We are gratified that their value is recognized by the “Statewide Plan.”

The “Statewide Plan” speaks in some detail of the need to direct resources to the P-12 sector and to develop standards and practices to ensure that high school graduates are college-ready. This will not, however, by itself solve the problem of college-readiness. We must not forget that many thousands of underprepared students are either already in the higher education system today or are headed to it before the benefits of proposed reforms to the P-12 system are realized. Furthermore, many thousands of underprepared adult high school graduates including immigrants will continue to need remedial support if they are to return to school and succeed.

While it is important to direct resources and reforms to improve college-readiness of students before they graduate high school, the tens of thousands of students who have or will arrive in college with remedial needs will continue to demand greater investments in resources for faculty, counseling, etc.

Unfortunately, funding for these programs has been cut over the years and they are not able to serve the numbers of students who need them currently. More to the point, resource-rich programs like these are not available to most students attending a CUNY college, most of whom need a resource-rich curriculum. As a result, their ability to benefit most fully from their college education suffers.

Quality suffers because public funding of CUNY has been significantly cut over the years. As CUNY points out in its Master Plan document, even as enrollments have soared to 270,000, the requisite number of full-time faculty has not kept pace. In 1975, when CUNY’s student population was about 250,000, CUNY employed 11,000 full-time faculty. By 1999, the number of full-time faculty had fallen by almost half. While some progress has been made, full-time faculty strength is now only at 7,000 and adjunct faculty teach more than half of the courses at CUNY.

The working conditions of adjunct faculty are not good and many have to teach at several institutions to make ends meet. In New York City, some adjunct faculty refer to themselves as “subway schleppers.” Adjuncts are poorly paid, do not have job security, are marginalized in curricular matters, do not have control over their schedules, and often do not have adequate time or meeting space to spend with students after class. Yet, most introductory courses and remedial courses are assigned to adjuncts because CUNY does not have sufficient full-time faculty.

Adjunct faculty are excellent and dedicated teachers, but they do not have the capacity to provide the time and attention that poorly prepared students need in order to succeed. It is not surprising that research is now showing that students who have a greater proportion of courses with adjunct faculty – especially for introductory courses – do not do as well as those who have a greater proportion of courses with full-time faculty.

The structure of the labor market in public sector higher education is not only a human problem for adjunct faculty and a matter of social and economic justice, but it is also a quality education problem.

We recommend the Regents include in the “Statewide Plan” recommendations to provide the resources to dramatically increase the number of full-time faculty and to provide resources to create reasonable working conditions for adjunct faculty.

### **The Need to Respect Academic Freedom and Shared Governance**

The “Statewide Plan” details policy for individual teacher and school leader preparation programs for the P-12 system. There have already been several meetings and exchanges of letters between the State Education Department and teacher education faculty from CUNY and SUNY under the auspices of New York State United Teachers. As expressed in those exchanges, there are significant disagreements with the policies articulated on this issue in the “Statewide Plan.” I believe we have been clear in our critiques of Regents’ policies in this respect. Rather than go over them again, I want to focus on an important underlying issue.

Our teacher education faculty at CUNY work very hard and they are consummate professionals. They teach in the classroom, supervise, counsel, engage in scholarship, and spend countless hours working on documentation for certification requirements. Quite frankly, they are exhausted by this crushing workload. Now, their professionalism is being questioned by the possible inappropriate use of a longitudinal student data base and the use of outside “graders” to evaluate students’ clinical experience.

Faculty control over curriculum and the grading process is not just an abstract principle, but has served to maintain the integrity and quality of the higher education system. Teacher education faculty already work in an intense “audit culture” that daily threatens academic freedom. Continuing to push in this direction will both undermine the capacity for teacher education faculty to exercise

their judgment and, consequently, drive them out of the profession. The end result of this process will not be better trained nor better qualified P-12 teachers.

### **The Need to Reform TAP**

We strongly support the Regents' efforts to extend TAP benefits to undocumented students who graduate from New York State high schools and GED programs. Most of these students go to CUNY. We know them to be highly motivated, talented students and have great confidence in the contributions they will make to New York State if they have the opportunity to attend college. We believe the Regents' support for "Dreamer" TAP reform is important.

Also, it is important to reform TAP for part-time students, graduate students, and students who are financially independent and have no dependents. Under current program parameters, these students receive no TAP or a very limited amount, and these students make up a significant portion of CUNY's student body.

Part-time students have increased at CUNY. Part-time students and financially independent students without dependents are the typical non-traditional student. These are the students who have dropped-out or stopped-out of college. They are the ones who are unemployed, need retraining, or want to go back to school while working. These are the students who are often the most in need and the students who will find it difficult to pay the progressively increasing tuition rates enacted last year.

We recommend the Regents add to their reform agenda for TAP the support of part-time students and financially independent students without dependents.

I want to thank you for making this opportunity available to present our testimony. I have appended for your review a series of specific recommendations by area of concern. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

## **PSC Recommendations by Area of Concern**

(PSC recommendations in response to SED "Bulletin of the Statewide Plan" issued in April 2011)

### **1. Strengthen connections between higher education and P-12 education functions of the University of the State of New York**

“How can higher education institutions provide more opportunities for online education to the P-12 system, especially online college-level courses in high school?”

#### **PSC RECOMMENDATION:**

Hybrid courses that augment on-line instruction with in-person classroom instruction have proven successful. Hybrid courses in the context of CUNY NOW, the university’s successful program for high school students, may be worth piloting. However, asynchronous courses that rely solely on on-line instruction have low completion rates and, we believe, are not recommended for P-12 students.

Given the ongoing privatization and contracting in the state’s school districts, we are concerned that proprietary colleges will see P-12 as a growth market. Thus, we would encourage the Regents to strictly regulate on-line high school courses to maintain educational quality and hold down costs to students, families and districts.

### **2. Strengthen connections of higher education with other functions of the University of the State of New York**

Gaps in the “continuum of education through the graduate level” Encouraging institutions to develop “career-ladder educational opportunities, especially in licensed professions”

#### **PSC RECOMMENDATION:**

The state should make greater investments in professional, paraprofessional and applied programs that are in high demand such as nursing, applied mathematics and pharmaceutical programs.

“What roles do higher education institutions play in meeting the needs of communities in which they are located?”

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

CUNY uses its Research Foundation to provide a significant volume of educational and training services, often on short-term employment contracts, that would otherwise be provided directly by the university. Faculty providing these services as RF contract employees are frequently paid less than part-time adjunct faculty employed directly by the university. The CUNY Research Foundation’s sole purpose is to 1) process grants from government, foundations and corporations for research performed at CUNY colleges and 2) provide education, training and research services to government agencies (e.g. training ACS foster care workers.) This is an extension of CUNY’s public education mission, and the Research Foundation should not be exempt from rules governing other public benefit agencies simply because it is incorporated as a private, non-profit organization. Moreover, as valuable as these grants are, they are no substitute for direct state investment in public higher education.

The state master plan should require CUNY to include data on educational and research services provided through the CUNY Research Foundation to assure better transparency and efficiency of its operation and to ensure that the benefit accrues to the university and the local communities that it serves.

**3. Strengthen connections between higher education and other parts of the state’s social and economic structure**

Encourage “career readiness” and identify “realistic job opportunities for graduates of both liberal arts and occupationally oriented programs.” “Identify mechanisms for dealing with disconnects.”

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

We would encourage the Regents to require colleges to make greater investments in career counseling and providing support to full-time faculty to run internship programs and mentor students. There is much greater demand for these services than the university is able to provide given long-term underfunding

What distinction is there between community and four-year colleges and should it exist? What is the role of community colleges in career preparation? What is the role of four-year institutions in career preparation?

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

Community colleges are open admissions institutions and thus have a unique mission to serve students with a broad range of needs, interests and levels of preparation. Community colleges provide multiple educational services that prepare students to enter a career, receive specific job training or complete coursework that allows them to transfer to a 4-year college. The multi-dimensional mission of community colleges as liberal arts institutions that provide a range of educational options needs acknowledgement.

1. The Regents should affirm that new public colleges and degree-granting programs, including for example, CUNY's New Community College, are covered by established by-laws and regulations regarding faculty governance in development of educational policy and curriculum.
2. Further, although in each of its last two 4-year master plans, CUNY has prioritized hiring additional full-time faculty sufficient to cover 70% of courses offered, cuts in public funding from the state and city coupled with growing enrollments have severely undermined the university's ability to achieve this goal. Currently, more than half of all courses offered at CUNY are taught by part-time adjunct faculty who have limited job security, limited access to employee benefits such as health insurance and unemployment insurance coverage, and minimal access to office facilities where they can meet with students. Adjunct faculty are under-paid for time they spend mentoring students, preparing course materials and other tasks necessary to maintain quality educational services. It will be impossible for CUNY to achieve the goal of having 70% of instruction provided by full-time faculty without additional investments of public funding.

**4. Improve access, quality and performance of higher education**

“How can higher education institutions *embrace* online learning and other technology, in mission-appropriate ways, to reach broader segments of New York's population? How can business assist them to do so?”

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

The AFT recommendations for best practices in distance education should be incorporated in what the Regents require including faculty control over curriculum, course design, evaluation and assuring that online courses are equivalent with courses held on-campus. Class size should be set at a reasonable level to assure the quality of instruction is maintained. Online course offerings should be subject to faculty governance.

Reforming Board of Regents oversight functions “given reduced financial and human resources”

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

Oversight by the Regents and SED is all the more necessary to protect the quality of education provided and assure that low-cost, high-quality public higher education remains available to all students, especially low-income, minority and foreign-born students for whom English is not their first language. Public higher education institutions, CUNY in particular, have been underfunded for several decades, and since 2005 have been absorbing increasing numbers of students without additional funding.

“How can institutions adjust to changes in demand for higher education and for different subjects of study? New York’s 2018 high school graduating class is projected to be 16.5 percent smaller than in 2008 if nothing changes. How will that affect enrollments? What steps should be taken to continue New York’s commitment to improving diversity of students and graduates?”

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

1. Assuring diversity of students and graduates is well served by recruiting and supporting a qualified, diverse faculty. PSC supports CUNY’s goal of recruiting a diversified faculty through cluster hiring in targeted disciplines and has urged CUNY to set even higher targets for diversity. But little progress has been made in this fiscal environment, as evidenced by PSC’s research on faculty and staff diversity over the last decade.
2. The state should provide more resources to expand ESL and other pre-college credit developmental courses provided by CUNY for low-income, minority and immigrant students who depend on these programs to transition to college. Faculty who teach in these programs outside the colleges (for example, the CUNY School for Professional Studies) should be treated as regular full-time faculty of CUNY.

3. Resident, undocumented immigrant students who are graduates of NYS high schools and thus, eligible to pay in-state resident tuition to CUNY and SUNY should be eligible to receive state financial aid and education loans administered by HESC.

Improving student retention and graduation rates. Improve existing programs. Other actions?

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

The Regents should set minimum standards including the number of professional staff assigned to student services or alternatively, establish a recommended student-to-counselor ratio that would assure that academic tutoring, career counseling and mental health services are available at much higher levels than present. State and city-funded programs including SEEK, College Discovery, EOP and NYC-funded CUNY ASAP and Black Male Initiative have all demonstrated that providing greater access to these services improves retention and graduation rates among minority students, but they do not begin to cover all the students who could benefit.

“What effective steps are there to get adults back into higher education?”<sup>1</sup>

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

TAP rules governing income eligibility standards and grant levels for low-income working adults should be updated to cover the real cost of attending CUNY and SUNY colleges. TAP rules should be revised and Part-Time TAP better funded to assist low-income working adult students attend college. Higher education institutions should be required to study and report on the impact of recent TAP rule changes (i.e. required GPA and credit standards for continuing to receive aid) on access and retention of low-income and minority students.

What kinds of innovation in financial assistance will support longer-term completions?

PSC RECOMMENDATIONS

Please see our proposals for TAP reform above.

**5. Address out-of-state institutions’ interest in serving New Yorkers**

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What should be the Regents policy on the entry of out-of-state institutions into New York? What additional programs should New York institutions offer to reduce the need for out-of-state institutions to seek permission to operate or establish new institutions in New York State?

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

Students should be protected from predatory for-profit institutions, especially those offering on-line degrees and focused on job-training.

Should the Regents regulate purely online education offered to New Yorkers who are employees of national companies under contract with those companies?

PSC RECOMMENDATION:

The public has an interest in regulating educational degrees and certifications, and should have confidence that the quality standards of degrees issued is maintained by the Regents. We do not oppose private companies that provide job training services, but we do not believe that they should be allowed to offer educational degrees.