

May 13, 2020

Dear President Mason, Provost Li, and the Administration of John Jay College of Criminal Justice,

We write as the chairs and directors of our college's academic departments and programs to express our profound disappointment in your decision not to reappoint all adjunct faculty hired on a semester-to-semester basis. As the global pandemic has demonstrated, lack of preparation leads to disaster. We, therefore, fully support our college preparing for a range of scenarios. We object, however, to the decision to dismiss our colleagues without consulting with the faculty and without giving the entire college community an opportunity to discuss and present other options for achieving reductions in our expenses.

The coronavirus pandemic and its economic consequences have produced challenges that few have seen in their lifetimes. Overnight, we found ourselves thrust into uncharted waters as our campus closed and all of us transitioned our courses online. Our students faced challenges learning in a new environment, stress, anxiety, illness, and death. Through all of this, the faculty, and our adjunct faculty in particular, worked long hours, battling the same conditions, to see our students through this crisis. As chairs and directors, we heard the stories and read the emails. We watched as our adjunct colleagues not only transitioned their own courses, but helped our less tech-savvy full-time faculty transition theirs. We watched as our adjunct colleagues counseled students through illness, grief, domestic abuse, and sudden poverty, to name but a few of the challenges our students are facing. We watched our adjunct colleagues do this without compensation and with compassion for members of our shared community. To dismiss these people who sacrificed much this semester, many of whom have been making these same sacrifices for years, without even an iota of consultation, is wrong.

While the economic well-being and health of adjunct faculty who rely on their university-provided health insurance will be the first casualty, student success will quickly follow. Our Strategic Plan has the education and support of our students as its first goal. The non-reappointment of hundreds of instructors (first estimated by the provost as 450) runs counter to that goal. In general terms, our adjunct faculty are well-trained, experienced professionals, and often provide valuable, practical knowledge. There is also an immediate need for the skills many of our adjunct faculty possess. Many are trained to teach online. They showed this proficiency this semester. Fall is uncertain, but many experts have counseled continuing distance learning for the foreseeable future. Many of us expect that this will be the case and the administration's decision has limited or denied our ability to draw on this important resource to enhance our students' educational experiences. Our Strategic Plan also lists embodying and promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion as a goal. We applaud your efforts in helping us strive towards this goal in our full-time hires. The dismissal of our adjunct faculty colleagues, however, eviscerates the growing diversity of our community.

This decision was an important one and one on which the faculty, through the Council of Chairs, through the Faculty Senate, and faculty broadly, should have been consulted. The budget estimates are sobering, a harbinger of the many hard choices to be made in the coming weeks and months. Shared governance is not just an ideal to adhere to in important conversations like

our Strategic Plan. Shared governance is of the utmost importance when difficult decisions need to be made. Different from many other institutions, a college is filled with experts: on finance and the economy, on crisis management, on ethics. Above all, we are experts in our curriculum, in the education of our students and in administering our departments. Chairs and faculty more broadly must be considered integral to decisions that impact pedagogy and curricula even under crisis-circumstances when important decisions need to be made swiftly.

We know that this decision was not made lightly and the weight of this and coming decisions will feel unbearable. We implore you to let us share in this burden. Lean on our knowledge and experience. Rely on our advice. In a time when we are physically siloed, you need to demonstrate commitment to inclusiveness. Only then can we say ours is a strong community. In the Budget and Planning Committee meeting, you, President Mason, stressed the importance of the coming conversations regarding our collective response to this crisis. That did not happen in the decision that came down to us one day later.

We eagerly anticipate working with you to find the way through this moment.

Respectfully,

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Benjamin Bierman, Department of Art and Music
Shu-Yuan Cheng, Department of Science
Angela Crossman, Department of Psychology
Robert Garot, Department of Sociology
Jay Paul Gates, Department of English
Katie Gentile, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies
Jessica Gordon-Nembhard, Department of Africana Studies
Jay Hamilton, Department of Economics
Allison Kavey, Humanities and Justice Studies Program
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