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**Council of Faculty Governance Leaders’
Response to Executive Vice Chancellor &
University Provost Wendy Hensel’s January 25, 2024 Memo
“Strategies for the Optimal Use of Academic Resources”**

The [Council of Faculty Governance Leaders](#) of The City University of New York (CUNY) recognizes the current and growing budget deficit at its colleges and the university overall, which is caused by chronic underfunding of CUNY by the city and state governments, as noted recently by the [AAUP](#), and by, despite its efforts, the inability of the Board of Trustees and university administration to obtain the necessary funding to preserve university functions (as is their role as dictated by Article II, Policy 2.01 of the [CUNY Manual of General Policy](#)).

We also recognize that the crisis of chronic underfunding has been exacerbated by university-wide enrollment declines and the uneven recovery from these declines across the colleges, as well as by the varying degrees of structural deficits amongst the colleges, as shown in the first quarter analysis of the current fiscal year provided by the [University’s Budget Office](#) (pp. 461-479).

We were, however, alarmed by the [memo](#) sent by Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost Wendy Hensel to the presidents and deans of the colleges recommending strategies for reducing academic expenses.

Within the broader context of recent [mandates](#) from CUNY to the colleges to stabilize their finances, which resulted in draconian cuts to staffing at [Queens and York colleges](#), the memo’s “recommendations” are being read as directives to immediate action by some presidents, provosts, and deans. This is evident in the failure to fill vacant lines, search cancellations, and attempts at unilaterally converting low-enrolled sections into independent studies across the colleges.

What is most troubling is that a number of the recommendations are not only in violation of a variety of CUNY Bylaws and local governing documents that define shared governance across the university and at the campuses, but are primarily geared to meet budget emergencies and will compromise the educational excellence the individual colleges strive for. Just as deleteriously, the memo negatively impacts the efforts of local governance leaders who either have a productive working relationship with their administrations, based on their respect for their shared governance roles, or are striving for one, in the interest of a collective response to the current crisis.

Unilaterally enacting the proposals of EVC Hensel’s memo contravenes the spirit of shared governance that is integral to academia, as outlined in the 1966 statement of the American Association of University Professors “[Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities](#),” but also violates the very laws that define this shared governance at CUNY and at the colleges. For instance, the [CUNY Bylaws](#) (Article IX, Section 9.3.2) place scheduling under the purview of Academic Chairs, and cannot simply be delegated to “key administrators,” as suggested in the memo, to serve the interest of budget efficiencies. Additionally, class sizes also fall under the purview of Academic Chairs, under the rationale that only department leaders can adequately respond to the needs of their disciplines to deliver high-quality education to their students. The optimal class size average suggested in the memo ignores this. Also, a number of our college governing charters explicitly place the responsibility over the creation and elimination of programs under the purview of the faculty governing bodies, in keeping with the [CUNY Manual of General Policy](#) (Article II, Policy 2.08, Subsection 3.2, “The Faculty”), which cannot be subverted solely on the “recommendations” of a CUNY Council on Academic Policy—neither the make-up of which, nor its scope, has yet to be made clear to us. The faculty’s role over program creation and elimination is further re-enforced in the [CUNY Bylaws](#) (Article VIII, Section 8.5), which explicitly recognize the faculty’s prerogatives over “curriculum, awarding of college credit, [and the] granting of degrees,” and that local governing charters that define the faculty’s role herein “shall supersede any inconsistent provisions contained in this article [of the CUNY Bylaws]” ([CUNY Bylaws](#), Article VIII, Section 8.11).

The Council of Faculty Governance Leaders stands firmly by our commitment to the mission of CUNY and takes with utmost seriousness our responsibility in ensuring educational quality and equity. It is understood that shared governance is an essential process in achieving the mission and goals of the university to provide students and faculty with an inclusive community where the interests of all are heard, valued, and considered for decision-making.

As such, we request:

That the CUNY Office of Academic Affairs [OAA] sends out a clarifying message to all presidents, provosts, and deans that explicitly states that EVC Hensel’s memo in no way seeks to violate any of the governing charters of The City University of New York and the colleges, which clearly lay out the prerogatives of faculty, Academic Chairs, and college governing bodies, and that presidents, provosts, and deans must continue to follow their governing charters by reaching out to local governance leaders and consulting with the relevant campus committees, as per local charters, as they plan their budgets through the following months;

And, that CUNY OAA clearly describes the scope and function of the CUNY Council on Academic Policy. We acknowledge, as reported at the February 20, 2024 UFS Plenary, that CUNY OAA has committed to having meaningful faculty representation on that council, which we strongly support, as any recommendations issued to the colleges should reflect the experiences of faculty familiar with program maintenance and the shared governance processes to effect program changes at the local level.

The Council of Faculty Governance Leaders, and the governing bodies they represent, stand ready to be a part of the solution to the current crisis the colleges and the university find themselves in, and to contribute to the future development of the university and of our colleges—as equal partners. The means for such collaboration lie in the university and college governing documents, and our requests above are aimed at maintaining such collaboration through shared governance.

We all have a part to play in the shared governance of the university and the colleges, and we invite the university and the college administrations to engage with us, the university and local governing bodies, in meaningful, transparent, and mutually respectful dialogue so that we can collectively provide the quality education and support our students deserve and expect.

Sincerely,

The Council of Faculty Governance Leaders:

Baruch College: Andreas Grein, Chair, Faculty Senate
Borough of Manhattan Community College: Christopher Stein, Chair, Academic Senate
Bronx Community College: Kevin John Bozelka, Chair, Faculty Council
Bronx Community College: Hisseine Faradj, Chair, Senate Executive Committee
Brooklyn College: Timothy Shortell, Chair, Faculty Council
City College of New York: David Jeruzalmi, Chair, Faculty Senate
College of Staten Island: Kenneth Gold, Chair, College Council
College of Staten Island: Susan Smith-Peter, Chair, Faculty Senate
Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism: Peter Beinart, Chair, Governance Council
CUNY Graduate Center: Peter Eckersall, Chair, Executive Committee of the Graduate Council
CUNY Graduate Center: Jonathan Peters, Chair, Doctoral Faculty Policy Committee
Guttman Community College: Anya Spector, Chair, Academic Senate
Hostos Community College: Ernest Ialongo, Chair, College-Wide Senate
Hunter College: Sarah Chinn, Chair, College Senate
Hunter College: Peter Dudek, President, Faculty Delegate Assembly
Hunter College: Lisa Finder, Vice-President, Faculty Delegate Assembly
John Jay College of Criminal Justice: Karen Kaplowitz, President, Faculty Senate
Kingsborough Community College: Scott Cally, Faculty Governance Leader, College Council
LaGuardia Community College: Cristina Bruns, Chair, College Senate
LaGuardia Community College: Rochell Isaac, President, Faculty Council
Lehman College: Joseph Fera, Chair, College Senate
New York City College of Technology: Phillip Anzalone, Chair, College Council
Queens College: Kevin Ferguson, Chair, Academic Senate
Queensborough Community College: Beth Counihan, Chair, Faculty Executive Committee
Queensborough Community College: Steven Dahlke, Chair, Academic Senate
York College: Donna Chirico, Chair, Faculty Caucus