November, 2011

Dear Colleagues:

I write regarding Hunter College’s policy on cancelling classes and making up for lost class time.

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) requires that all credit-bearing courses meet for fixed numbers of hours. Our students expect and deserve instruction of the highest quality for the full duration of their class time over the course of the full semester; the taxpayers of New York State expect and deserve to know that we of the City University of New York are committed to delivering all of the instruction that the state requires and that residents and students support via taxes and tuition. I know that you, our outstanding faculty, take extremely seriously your roles in upholding the highest academic and institutional standards.

Because of our academic, ethical, and legal responsibilities, the decision to cancel classes is always a serious one, whether it is made by the institution, as in the case of inclement weather, or by departments, for compelling personal or professional reasons. I can assure you that the decision to close during inclement weather is always the option of last resort at Hunter College and entails extensive planning across executive, academic, finance and administrative, and student service areas to ensure that faculty are able to meet their curricular goals and students are not shortchanged despite cancelled classes. As you know, we have recommended a variety of options for compensating for missed work due to bad weather, from rescheduling classes during the reading period to using Blackboard or email to post missed materials and information, to assigning videos on reserve at the library, to conducting additional online class sessions or assigning additional exercises online.

The decision to cancel a class should never be taken lightly and should be made only when no other options exist. Unexpected health or personal problems and professional conflicts can arise for all of us, but we expect that our full time and part time faculty make their classes their highest professional priority. Indeed, I would like to call your attention to Section 14.8 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, which applies to adjunct faculty. Section 14.8 provides that:
Adjunct classroom teachers and teacher on multiple position assignments employed for a course may be excused for personal illness or personal emergencies including religious observance, death in the immediate family or similar personal needs which cannot be postponed for a period of 1/15 of the total number of clock hours in the particular session or semester. Request for such leave, where possible, must be made in advance, in writing. If it is not possible to make such a request in advance, the department chairperson or supervisor should be informed as soon as possible. The reason provided must be satisfactory to the chairperson or supervisor.

Similarly, whenever possible, full-time faculty must have the advanced approval of their chairs or program heads to miss a scheduled class. In cases in which advanced planning is not possible due to the unexpected nature of the event, the chair or head must be notified of the cancelled class as soon as possible and must approve any substitute arrangements. Every effort must be made to notify students of the cancellation and the substitute arrangements as soon as possible. Except in cases in which a class can be rescheduled during the reading day, we expect departments to schedule substitute instructors or require equivalent assignments rather than to reschedule the class on a different day and time. As you well know, given our students’ tight academic schedules and significant off-campus commitments, it can be extremely difficult to reschedule missed classes at a time that all registered students can actually attend class.

Cancelled classes and the imperative to make up the lost work pose challenges for students, faculty, and departments alike. We trust that department chairs, program heads, and full- and part-time faculty appreciate the gravity of cancelling classes. Please know that we are here to support you and your departments in meeting our collective responsibilities. I thank you, as always, for all you do for the college.

Sincerely,

Vita C. Rabinowitz
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs