

Why I support the plan to create a new Hunter College Science/Health Professions Building and a new Julia Richman Education Complex

Hunter College is in dire need of a new state-of-the-art building for the sciences and health professions. Our colleagues in the natural sciences have argued eloquently and persuasively in support of the plan for a new science and health building at the site currently occupied by the Julia Richman Educational Complex (JREC) at 2nd Avenue and 68th Street site (see: Hunter College 68th Street Campus Science Faculty at: [HYPERLINK "http://hunter.cuny.edu/sciencebuilding/support.html" \t "_blank" http://hunter.cuny.edu/sciencebuilding/support.html](http://hunter.cuny.edu/sciencebuilding/support.html)). This plan is not only vital to the future of education and research in the *sciences*, but also to the future of education and research in the *health professions* at Hunter College.

Health care is predicted to be one of the key growth industries, both nationally and locally, in the coming decades. This is due to a number of trends – such as emerging and drug-resistant infections (e.g. MDR-TB and MRSA); the joint epidemics of diabetes and obesity; growing health disparities between rich and poor individuals and communities; and medical and public health advances that have led to dramatic increases in life expectancy – from 43 years in 1900 to 79 years today. As one example, more and more people are living longer with chronic diseases, such as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, certain cancers and HIV/AIDS. Consequently, our society will face an increased need for an array of health professionals and services – such as nurses to help patients manage chronic diseases; physical therapists, audiologists and speech pathologists to rehabilitate injury and stroke victims; medical laboratory scientists to analyze screening and diagnostic tests and develop new medical treatments; and public health professionals to design health-promoting interventions to improve living conditions, lifestyles and longevity.

Hunter's health professional programs in nursing, physical therapy, public health, medical laboratory sciences and communication sciences can be expected to fill critical workforce needs and thrive in the future. Already, Hunter offers some of the most well-regarded and competitive health professional training programs in the city and country. Several of these programs routinely turn down highly qualified applicants and could potentially expand, but are constrained, in part, by space limitations. In addition, Chancellor Goldstein recently announced an exciting and ground-breaking initiative to create a CUNY School of Public Health at Hunter College. The new school will be the first *public* school of public health in New York City and will have a unique focus on understanding how city living affects health and how to design and manage cities that promote health for all. Already, CUNY is planning several new doctoral and master's degree programs in public health, in preparation for the opening of the new school.

To meet the increased demands for educational programs in the health professions, Hunter must expand its' classroom, office and laboratory space. The plan for a new Hunter

Science and Health Professions building at 68th St. and 2nd Ave will address these needs in a practical manner. It calls for relocating the Health Professional programs closer to several key medical and research centers – such as Weill Cornell Medical Center, Rockefeller University and Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center. Many Hunter faculty already collaborate on research and educational projects and many students carry out internships and are employed at these institutions. Bringing Health Professions faculty and students in closer proximity to these institutions will potentially strengthen and expand research, internship and employment opportunities.

In addition, the plan will provide a much needed new home for health professional programs. Built in the mid-1950's, Hunter's current health professions building at the Brookdale Campus is in dire need of modernization and expansion. The experimental and computer laboratories and other facilities are woefully out-of-date. The physical infrastructure is antiquated. Classrooms are already filled to capacity, and there is little space to house our growing faculty, staff and programs.

Why not simply construct a new facility at Brookdale? While this may seem like a good idea in theory, the financial and practical obstacles are formidable. From a fiscal standpoint, without selling the Brookdale campus, it would be impossible to raise all the funds needed for a new science and health professions building. On a practical level, moving to Brookdale would pose hardships for science faculty and students by splitting laboratories, classes and offices (see, again: Hunter College 68th Street Campus Science Faculty at: [HYPERLINK "http://hunter.cuny.edu/sciencebuilding/support.html" \t "_blank" http://hunter.cuny.edu/sciencebuilding/support.html](http://hunter.cuny.edu/sciencebuilding/support.html)).

By contrast, the proposed plan will address the potential fiscal and practical obstacles by selling the Brookdale campus to a developer, who will be required to construct a new facility for the JREC schools on 25th Street. The proceeds from the sale will be used to finance, in part, the new science and health professions building at Hunter.

Understandably, many JREC students, faculty and administrators are concerned about being asked to move and about what the plan will mean for the future of their small and highly successful schools. Clearly, careful attention must be paid to the planning and transition process so as to preserve the integrity and success of both JREC's and Hunter's excellent programs. Many of these assurances are already built into the plan. As one example, not until the brand new facility is ready for occupancy will JREC students, faculty and administrators move from their current location, thus minimizing any disruption in services.

In closing, the potential benefits of this plan are enormous. It will assure continued high quality public education -- from primary through post-graduate levels -- for thousands of New York City students. It will strengthen opportunities for innovative educational

programs, ground-breaking applied research, and fill critical workforce needs. For all of the reasons outlined above, I support the plan and I urge the stakeholders to work together on our common mission of providing affordable, accessible and innovative educational experiences to New York City students and to make this plan a reality.

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