

“The amount of labor we do for free” and other contradictions

A collective inquiry into the pedagogical choices of CUNY adjunct and graduate student instructors who taught with free of charge materials during the year 2020

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Abstract

A collective of five CUNY researchers developed and conducted a survey-based study of how CUNY adjunct and graduate student faculty taught with free of charge materials during the year 2020. A total of 152 respondents filled out the survey. Four themes emerged from the analysis of their responses:

1. Adjunct and graduate student faculty who taught with free of charge materials at CUNY in 2020 were motivated by economic, logistical, and pedagogical benefits. They invested considerable amounts of time in both creating and selecting material.
2. Their pedagogical choices about learning materials were formed in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the imposition of austerity measures in higher education, and #Black Lives Matter protests.
3. Respondents faced challenges making their free of charge materials accessible to disabled students.
4. Their experiences are imbricated in the power dynamics of the classrooms, departments, and the university at large.

The report ends with a series of recommendations for the administrators, librarians, teaching and learning centers, and professional development offices who have been involved in the discussion around “open” pedagogies at CUNY. We highlight the inconsistencies and contradictions that surface when centering the experience of adjuncts and graduate student instructors.

Context and Intentions

In fall 2019, the CUNY Office of Research and Library Services issued a call for proposals on assessing the impact of Open Education Resources (OER) on pedagogies. We — five adjunct and graduate student instructors who had worked together previously through CUNY scholarship, teaching, and activism — came together as a group to submit a proposal, eager to participate in a collective reflection around transformative pedagogies. The goal was to better understand the practices, experiences, and needs of adjunct and graduate student educators who teach with Open Educational Resources at CUNY, a university that primarily serves Black and Brown working-class students.

We received word that the Office of Research and Library Services had selected our project for funding in November 2019. Excited, the five of us began to meet regularly. Not long after returning from winter break and starting the spring 2020 semester, our worlds and classrooms were tremendously changed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The CUNY Office of Research and Library Services issued an extension of the terms of the grant, and we paused our work for a few months. We reconnected in fall 2020 to design a survey to be distributed in the early months of 2021.

Specifically, we designed this survey to understand what teaching with free of charge materials implied, and made possible for educators and students alike at CUNY in 2020, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the #Black Lives Matter protests, and as contingent CUNY workers faced new waves of layoffs. In the context of ongoing student-led campaigns to unsettle the Euro-centered curriculum, we also wanted to understand how educators worked to locate resources by Black, Indigenous, Asian, Caribbean, Latinx, Middle Eastern/North African (MENA), and Pacific Islander writers, scholars, and/or scientists which are geared toward these ethnic-geographical identities of students. Finally, we also wanted to understand how teaching with free of charge materials intersect with issues of disability justice.

Scope of the study

This study explores the experiences of CUNY adjunct and graduate student faculty (criteria 1) who taught with free of charge materials (criteria 2) during the year 2020 (criteria 3). In this section, we explain why and how we defined these three criteria of eligibility. We also connect each criteria to a set of reflections that guided the development of our survey questions.

Adjuncts and Graduate Student Instructors

As we distributed the survey, we encountered questions from department chairpersons, with inquirers asking why we would “limit” our sample in this way. The idea guiding the project is that given the precarity of contingent faculty’s working conditions, adopting Open Educational Resources (OER) comes with a specific set of challenges. As adjunct instructors ourselves in different disciplines and with varying years teaching at the college level, we — the five authors of this report — felt ideally positioned to study the experience of our peers.

The NYS-funded CUNY OER Scale Up Initiative has made resources (workshops, syllabus-prep guides, stipends for course conversions, consultations with librarians) available to all faculty, and many adjuncts and graduate student instructors have benefited from it. As contingent faculty teach entry-level courses that require cost-prohibitive textbooks, CUNY has recognized that the broad adoption of OER depends upon graduate students and adjuncts incorporating them into our classes.¹

However, the stipends and training resources available to contingent faculty to teach with Open Educational Resources present contradictions that have to do with the corporatization and defunding of our colleges. What are the consequences of asking adjuncts and graduate student workers, with no job security, to make the fruits of their intellectual labor publicly available? In 2016, Long Island University (LIU) provided an example of how teaching materials can be utilized by college administrators in their efforts to repress workers’ demands. Former LIU librarian Emily Drabinski writes: “Management took our syllabi and uploaded them into course shells and assigned administrators and people hired with little vetting to teach our classes for low wages. They cut our salaries and health insurance with no warning and blocked our access to email, one of the only tools we had to communicate with each other. They hired security guards to prevent us from coming to campus.”² During this COVID-19 era of online learning, further concerns abound about how massive open online courses (MOOCs) are manna for

¹ We were unable to find a study of how much CUNY students spend on textbooks and related course materials. The College Board estimates that U.S. college students spend an average of \$1,200 a year on books and other materials. The CUNY OER program also estimates that students will spend this much on books.

“Quick Guide: College Costs – BigFuture | College Board.” *College Board*, <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/pay-for-college/college-costs/quick-guide-college-costs>.

“Open Educational Resources – The City University of New York.” *The City University of New York*, <https://www.cuny.edu/libraries/open-educational-resources/>.

² Page 56 in Drabinski, Emily. “What is critical about critical librarianship?” *Art Libraries Journal*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2019, pp. 49-57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/alj.2019.3>.

conservatives, “who want to reduce the size of government and dislike labor unions,” and neoliberal public university administrators, who “see online classes not only as a way of cutting public spending but also as a weapon to reduce the influence of organized labor.”³ Issues of exploitation and worker solidarity were thus central to our inquiry.

Given these contexts, we identified two guiding questions about adjunct and graduate student instructors:

- **What types of institutional and financial support is available for adjunct and graduate students?** We wanted to know if funding sources and pedagogical trainings were reaching adjunct and graduate student instructors, and whether they sufficiently met these instructor’s specific needs. Furthermore, we wanted to know if instructors were supported by their colleagues, chairs, and campuses as they incorporated free of charge materials into their classes.
- **Are adjuncts and graduate students supported in a community of their peers?** In addition to the vertical organizational structure investigated in our questions above, we also wanted to look for solidarity among adjunct and graduate student instructors. Are these instructors, who already teach with free of charge materials, in conversation with each other?

Teaching with free of charge materials

To determine eligibility to the survey, we asked the respondents whether they teach with materials that are free of charge for students. What difference do we make between “free of charge materials” and OER? And why did we focus on the former?

OER has become a very well-known acronym in open access circles and university administrations. It designates learning and teaching materials that are licensed as open access, reusable, and re-mixable. This study was prompted by the observation that many of our adjunct and graduate student colleagues are not familiar with the acronym OER and the NYS-funded initiative and programs, and yet do enact principles of open pedagogy in their classrooms and do not require students to pay for learning materials.⁴ To better understand the practices, experiences, and needs of these adjunct educators and graduate student workers, we define “free of charge materials” as all the learning materials used in the classroom provided free of charge to the students. Naturally, the category of free of charge materials include OER, but it also includes materials from non-open sources that faculty or universities provide free of charge to students. All the adjunct educators and graduate student workers who taught in 2020 with materials that fell under this category were eligible to take the survey.

With regards to free of charge materials, we identified two guiding questions:

³ Page 6 in Kahlenberg, Richard. “The politics of online learning: For conservatives, the embrace of MOOCs kills two birds with one stone.” *On Campus: The National Publication of AFT Higher Education Faculty and Professional Staff*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2013-2014, pp. 4-6, https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/periodicals/oc_winter1314.pdf.

⁴ For more on OER at CUNY, see: <https://www.cuny.edu/libraries/open-educational-resources/>

- **What does teaching with free material entail practically?** We were very interested in learning about the nitty gritty, detailed, in the weeds work that goes into teaching with free of charge materials. What do adjuncts do? Create? How do they use already existing materials? What concrete situations do they face in the classrooms?
- **How does teaching with free of charge materials intersect with issues of disability justice?** Considering that the central objective for adopting OER in higher education is to make course contents more readily available to a maximum range of learners, issues of accessibility for disabled students are a primary concern. This was the case even before CUNY was forced to transition mid-stream to a distance-learning system in spring 2020.⁵ During this transition, adjunct and graduate student instructors faced a new format in which they were responsible for making their courses accessible, in addition to experiencing their own pandemic-related challenges and heightened job insecurity. What issues around accessibility did instructors encounter? What steps did they take to make sure their courses were accessible to disabled students? Did these new materials, and/or the new virtual teaching environment, present new challenges to disabled students and faculty?

During the year 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic, the budget cuts announced at CUNY in May-June 2020 including the layoff of thousands of CUNY adjuncts, and the 2020 #Black Lives Matter protests in the U.S. focused our attention on the fact that pedagogical choices about learning materials could not be divorced from the broader issues that affected CUNY students' lives. CUNY students are predominantly first-generation college students from racialized and working-class communities whose members worked as essential workers during periods of lockdown, and who are disproportionately harassed by the police.⁶ Already prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, 13 percent of CUNY students cared for children, 55 percent had experienced food insecurity, and 72 percent had worried about being able to pay for housing costs.⁷

To learn more about how teaching with free of cost materials intersected with incorporating the ongoing issues of health, austerity, and policing, we identified two guiding questions:

⁵ We recommend readings on disability experiences at CUNY from the Visible Pedagogy project, including:

Rice-Evans, Jesse. "Exploding Access: Trauma, Tech, and Embodiment." *Visible Pedagogy*, 2 April 2019, <https://vp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2019/04/02/exploding-access-trauma-tech-and-embodiment/>.

Stella, Andréa. "Institutional Care: Designing for Access." *Visible Pedagogy*, 30 April 2019, <https://vp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/2019/04/30/institutional-care-designing-for-access/>.

⁶ The university reports that: 22 percent of CUNY students are Asian, 26 percent are Black, 32 percent are Hispanic.

CUNY Office of Institutional Research. "A Profile of Undergraduates at CUNY Senior and Community Colleges: Fall 2019." 18 August 2020, https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/oira/institutional/data/current-student-data-book-by-subject/ug_student_profile_f19.pdf.

⁷ CUNY Office of Institutional Research. "2018 Student Experience Survey Interactive Results." <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/oira.cuny/viz/2018StudentExperienceSurvey/CoverPage>.

- **How was the decision to teach with free of charge materials in 2020 informed by the reality of student struggles during the pandemic?** Teaching with free resources might have provided solutions to many students' challenges around affordability during the pandemic. At the same time, interacting with free materials without the public goods of on campus printers, computers, and internet access may have presented new challenges. How did instructors adapt to their students' difficulties, financial and otherwise?
- **Do instructors who teach with free of charge materials select and create resources that can help foster conversations and learning about the real-life issues that affected CUNY students' lives: precarity, racism, austerity?** We asked respondents to explain if and how they located free of charge materials that dealt with the period of COVID-19, austerity measures in education, and/or the resurgence of the #Black Lives Matter movement.

Survey Design

In this section, we explain how we developed the survey. We review the characteristics of our “population of study,” consider the implications of a small sample size, provide background information on the demographics of the respondents, and present an overview of our survey questions.

Estimating the size of our population of study

It is difficult to estimate the size of our population of study, i.e. all graduate students and adjunct instructors who taught at CUNY in the year 2020 using free of charge materials.

CUNY Office of Human Resources Management annually reports the number of instructional employees by title. We have aggregated the numbers in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Counts of contingent and non-contingent faculty employed at CUNY (2018-2020)⁸

	2018	2019	2020
Adjunct faculty	14,131	13,891	12,909
Graduate assistants ⁹	1,489	1,575	1,525
Total contingent faculty (adjunct faculty and graduate assistants)	15,620	15,466	14,434
Non-contingent faculty ¹⁰	7,627	7,522	7,253
Total CUNY faculty	15,620	15,466	21,687

The data for 2020 was captured on November 23, 2020. As adjuncts and graduate students do not necessarily teach every semester, the count of 14,434 may not be accurate for the full year. Furthermore, it is likely that if the data had been captured in March or April 2020, the overall

⁸ Source:

CUNY Office of Human Resources Management. “CUNY Workforce Demographics by College, Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2018 Instructional and Classified Staff.” January 2019, The City University of New York, <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/about/administration/offices/hr/recruitment-diversity/statistics-and-reports/archive/Fall-2018-CUNY-Workforce-Demographics-Final.pdf>.

CUNY Office of Human Resources Management. “CUNY Workforce Demographics by College, Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2019 Instructional and Classified Staff.” The City University of New York, <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/media-assets/FINAL-Fall-2019-CUNY-Workforce-Demographics.pdf>.

CUNY Office of Human Resources Management. “CUNY Workforce Demographics by College, Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2020 Instructional and Classified Staff.” The City University of New York, <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/media-assets/FINAL-Fall-2020-CUNY-Workforce-Demographics.pdf>.

⁹ Graduate assistants who also hold an adjunct teaching appointment are counted only once, as graduate assistants.

¹⁰ We aggregated the numbers from the following categories as reported by the CUNY Office of Human Resources: Full time faculty, Visiting faculty, Substitute full time faculty, and Research faculty

number reported for the year 2020 would have been higher. Indeed, as part of a wave of austerity measures, the CUNY administration laid off 2,800 contingent workers (adjuncts but also college lab technicians and non-teaching adjuncts) in the early summer of 2020.¹¹ Behind these austere reports and lifeless numbers, the fluctuation of the adjunct workforce every year reminds us of the precarity and vulnerability that contingent instructors experience.

Now, out of these approximately 14,000 to 15,000 adjuncts and graduate students who taught in 2020, how many taught with free of charge materials? This is difficult to estimate because there is no official data on the job titles of instructors who teach with free of charge materials. CUNY Office of Research and Library Services estimates that as of fall 2019, 23,661 sections across CUNY fell under the Zero Textbook Cost designation, but with no indication of the breakdown by instructors' job titles.¹² In this context, we cannot give an estimate of the size of our population of study.

A qualitative research project: small sample size and open-ended questions

We aimed for a hundred valid responses, a small sample from the perspective of quantitative researchers. With such a small sample, comparing experiences across groups — the experiences of adjuncts at community college faculty compared to those at senior colleges, for example — would not be a rigorous comparison. Rather than try to explain differences within our sample, we sought to design open-ended questions that could uncover the depth and specificities of people's experiences.

The small sample size allowed us to read every single response multiple times, and we tried during the analysis and reporting phases to account for the complexity of what was shared with us. We cannot statistically “demonstrate” with our data that adjunct and graduate student faculty encounter substantially different experiences using free of charge materials than non-contingent faculty (though, we still have a hunch that is the case), but instead, we have collected a deep documentation of how adjunct and graduate student taught with free of charge materials at CUNY in 2020.

A note on demographics

What are the demographic characteristics of the adjuncts and graduate students who taught at CUNY in 2020 with free of charge materials? For an approximation of the racial and gender makeup of CUNY contingent faculty, we rely on the data from the CUNY Office of Human Resources Managements. We present aggregated numbers in tables 2 and table 3 below.

¹¹ Valbrun, Marjorie. “CUNY Layoffs Prompt Union Lawsuit.” *Inside Higher Ed*, 6 July 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/07/06/economic-fallout-pandemic-leads-layoffs-cuny-and-union-lawsuit>.

¹² Page 5 in The City University of New York. “New York State Open Educational Resources Funds: CUNY Two Year Report.” The City University of New York, January 2020, https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/page-assets/libraries/open-educational-resources/CUNY-OER-Report-Year2_SinglePage.pdf.

Table 2 : Adjuncts and Graduate Assistants employed at CUNY during the Fall 2020, by race and ethnicity¹³

	Black/ African American	Puerto Rican	Hispanic/ Latino (excluding Puerto Rican)	Asian/ Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Two or More Races	Total: Federal Protected Groups	Italian American	White	Blank/ Not Specified	Total
Adjunct faculty	2,140	287	1,316	1,680	19	144	5,586	456	6,848	19	12,909
	16.58%	2.22%	10.19%	13.01%	0.15%	1.12%	43.27%	3.53%	53.05%	0.15%	100%
Graduate assistants	83	32	240	288	1	48	692	21	810	2	1,525
	5.44%	2.10%	15.74%	18.89%	0.07%	3.15%	45.38%	1.38%	53.11%	0.13%	100%
Total contingent faculty (adjunct faculty and graduate assistants)	2,223	319	1,556	1,968	20	192	6,278	477	7,658	21	14,434
	15.40%	2.21%	10.78%	13.63%	0.14%	1.33%	43.49%	3.30%	53.06%	0.15%	100%
Non-contingent faculty	886	164	597	1,035	11	65	2,758	376	4,117	2	7,253
	12.22%	2.26%	8.23%	14.27%	0.15%	0.90%	38.03%	5.18%	56.76%	0.03%	100%
Total CUNY faculty	3,109	483	2,153	3,003	31	257	9,036	853	11,775	23	21,687
	14.34%	2.23%	9.93%	13.85%	0.14%	1.19%	41.67%	3.93%	54.30%	0.11%	100%

Although these fixed categories obscure how people experience their identities, the demographic breakdown allows us to identify a general trend: an overrepresentation of white faculty (over 55 percent) in comparison to the racial and ethnic makeup of undergraduate students at CUNY.¹⁴

¹³ CUNY Office of Human Resources Management. "CUNY Workforce Demographics by College, Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2020 Instructional and Classified Staff." The City University of New York, <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/media-assets/FINAL-Fall-2020-CUNY-Workforce-Demographics.pdf>.

¹⁴ For a powerful critique of the essentializing terms of ethnicity and race, see Bashi Treitler, Vilna. *The Ethnic Project: Transforming Racial Fiction Into Ethnic Factions*. Stanford University Press, 2013.

Table 3: Adjuncts and Graduate Assistants employed at CUNY in the fall 2020, by gender¹⁵

	Male	Female	Non-binary / Not specified	Total
Adjunct faculty	6,206	6,682	21	12,909
	48.07%	51.76%	0.16%	100%
Graduate assistants	581	939	5	1,525
	38.10%	61.57%	0.33%	100%
Total contingent faculty (adjunct faculty and graduate assistants)	6,787	7,621	26	14,434
	47.02%	52.80%	0.18%	100%
Non-contingent faculty	3,639	3,608	6	7,253
	50.17%	49.74%	0.08%	100%
Total CUNY instructors	10,426	11,229	32	21,687
	48.07%	51.78%	0.15%	100%

¹⁵ CUNY Office of Human Resources Management. "CUNY Workforce Demographics by College, Ethnicity and Gender Fall 2020 Instructional and Classified Staff." The City University of New York, <https://www.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/media-assets/FINAL-Fall-2020-CUNY-Workforce-Demographics.pdf>.

We did not ask background questions in our survey, such as age, race and ethnicity, gender and sexuality, disability, income or other economic measures. Why? Given our survey's specific attention to accessibility, austerity, health, and racial justice, would it not be useful to know how experiences varied across these groups and identities?

Our reason for this choice is two-fold. The first stems from the logistics of our survey: with a small sample, we would be unable to make any generalizations about social location or identity and teaching with free of charge materials. As we elaborated above, we also do not have accurate data on our population: all adjunct and graduate student instructors who taught with free of charge materials in 2020. If, for example, more women than people of other genders completed our survey, we would not be able to conclude that teaching with free of charge materials varied with gender as we could not rule out the possibility that more women simply took the survey.

Furthermore, we spent time discussing the theoretical and political meaning of including these types of identity questions. On one hand, we saw value in being able to contextualize participants' responses in terms of their social location. Omitting categorical identity questions created a risk of evading issues of race, gender, and ability in responses and interpretation. On the other hand, we were apprehensive to list social categories in a multiple-choice format that obscured the complex ways these identities are experienced and produced. Ultimately, we decided not to include questions about group affiliation, identities, and economic background. Instead, we wrote open-ended questions through which we hoped respondents would share the aspects of their personhood they found relevant to the topic. We reflect more on this decision and the results it produced in the conclusion.

In addition to questions related to the respondents' gender, sexuality, income, race, and ability, we chose not to ask about the campuses or kind of institution (senior or community colleges) where instructors taught. This decision came from an interest in assuring anonymity to our respondents. In some cases, individuals brought up their campuses in their responses.

Overview of the survey questions

We created a 26-question survey across 4 sections, outlined in the table below.

Table 4: Overview of survey questions

Section	Number of questions	Description
1) Eligibility	3 multiple choice	Ensured respondents taught at CUNY in 2020, were adjunct or graduate student instructors, and taught using free of charge materials fully or as a supplement
2) Teaching Background	3 write in, 3 multiple choice	Discipline taught at CUNY, size and level of classes, optional contact information

3) Experience with syllabus prep, in the classroom, and in the department	10 write in, 5 multiple choice	Why and how respondents teach with free of charge materials; 2020 social context of #Black Lives Matter, COVID-19, and austerity; what did and did not work well; accessibility and learning accommodations; training and funding support
4) Reflections	2 write in	Reflections on teaching and suggestions for us

Data Collected

We circulated the survey over a two-month period in February-March 2021 on 13 of CUNY's 25 campuses: six senior colleges, six community colleges, and the Graduate Center.¹⁶

Our recruitment strategy had three parts. First, we advertised the survey on campus-based listservs for adjunct workers and graduate students. Second, we asked the CUNY OER representative as well as the Teaching and Learning Centers on each of these 13 campuses to advertise the survey. Third, we emailed about 220 department heads across the 13 campuses with a request to advertise the survey to their contingent instructors.

We received a total of 152 "valid" responses, validity that was defined as an individual who met our survey criteria and answered at least one of our open-ended questions. Because we do not know the size of our population (the number of adjuncts and graduate students who taught with free of charge materials in 2020), we cannot calculate a response rate. We were pleased with our response size as it exceeded our goal of 100 participants.

Descriptive information on our sample is provided in the pie charts below.

About 50 percent of our sample taught two semesters at CUNY in 2020, followed by about 20 percent teaching one and 20 percent teaching three, and only 10 percent teaching in all four. An overwhelming majority of our sample taught solely as an adjunct, with only about 13 percent of responses indicating a graduate fellowship supported their teaching. While about 60 percent of respondents taught courses using exclusively free of charge materials, 40 percent taught with a blend of free and for-purchase materials. Few of our respondents said they had one year or less teaching experience; almost 60 percent of respondents said they had been teaching at the college-level for more than 5 years. Respondents taught a mixture of entry and upper-level courses. Finally, respondents taught in a variety of disciplines. We asked respondents their disciplines as an open-ended question and received 90 unique responses, which we coded to 18 fields. Faculty from the humanities and social sciences most heavily represented at 55 percent of the sample.

¹⁶ Prior to conducting research on a CUNY campus, researchers must obtain approvals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at each CUNY college where they plan to conduct their research. We sought approval from the IRBs at each CUNY college, and obtained approvals from 13 campuses out of 25.

In 2020, how many semesters did you teach at CUNY?

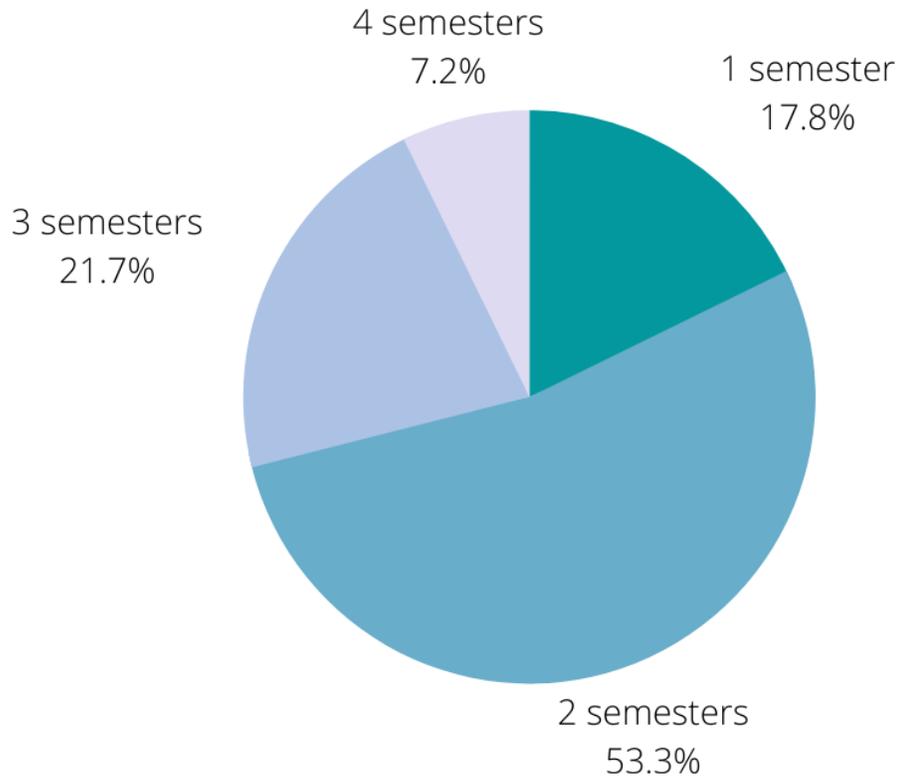


Figure 1. Pie chart of responses to the question: In 2020, how many semesters did you teach at CUNY? Responses: 1 semester, 17.8%; 2 semesters, 53.3%; 3 semesters, 21.7%; 4 semesters, 7.2%.

In 2020, did you teach as a...

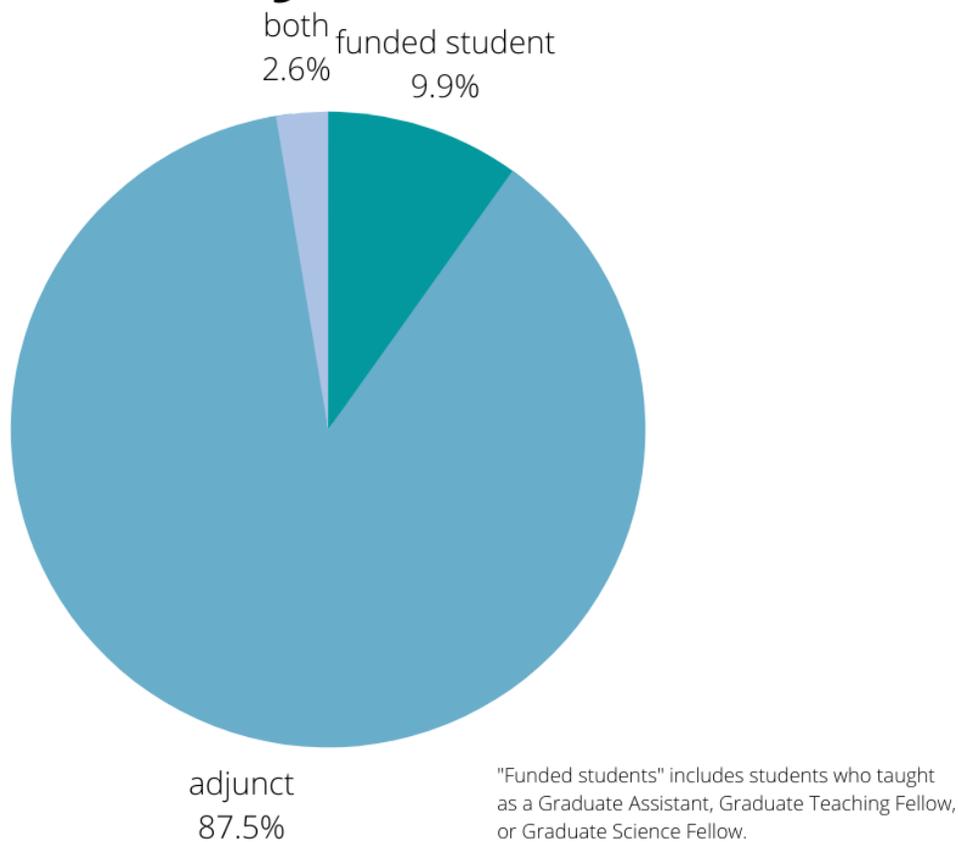


Figure 2. Pie chart of responses to the question: In 2020, did you teach as... Responses: A funded student, 9.9%; An adjunct, 87.5%; Both, 2.6%. Note: "Funded student" includes students who taught as a Graduate Teaching Assistant, Graduate Teaching Fellow, or Graduate Science Fellow.

How did you use free of charge materials in your classes?

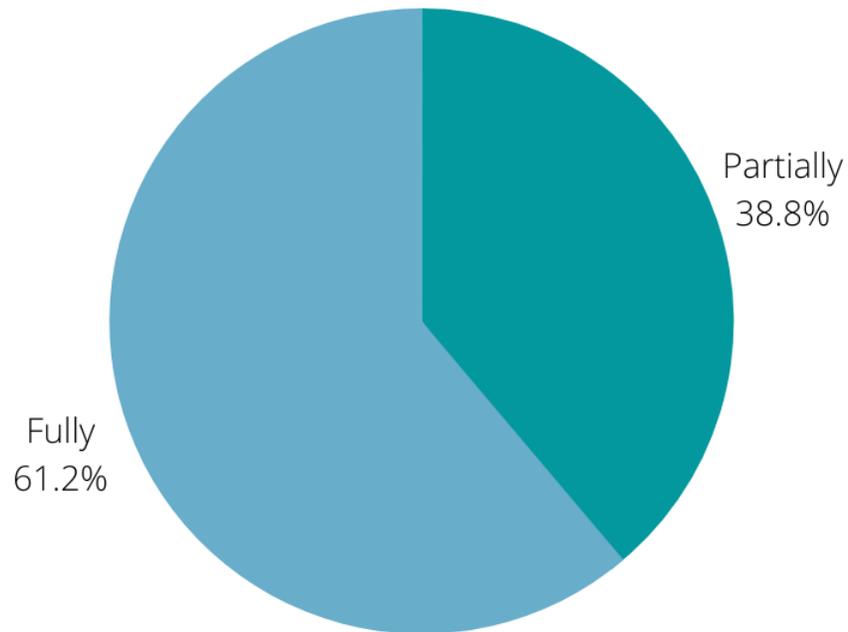


Figure 3. Pie chart of responses to the question: How did you use free of charge materials in your classes? Responses: Partially, 38.8%; Fully, 61.2%.

How many years have you taught at CUNY and other institutions?

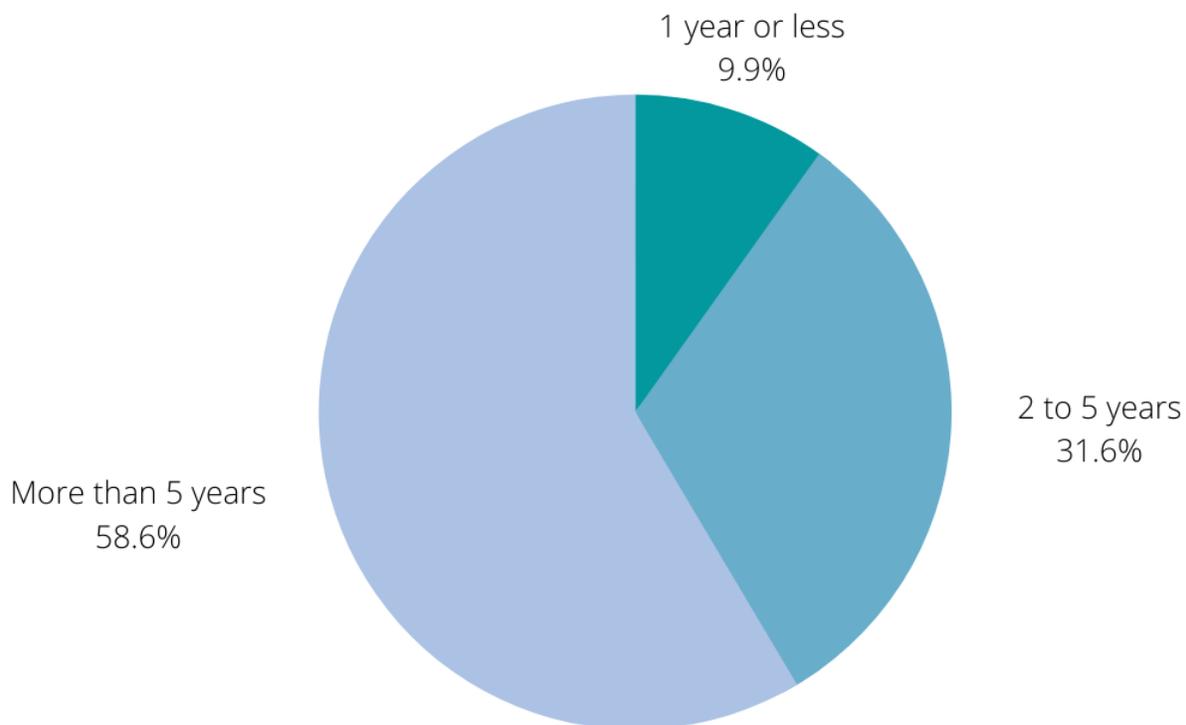


Figure 4. Pie chart of responses to the question: For how many years have you taught undergraduates at CUNY and other institutions? Responses: 1 year or less, 9.9%; 2 to 5 years, 31.6%; More than 5 years, 58.6%.

What level courses do you usually teach?

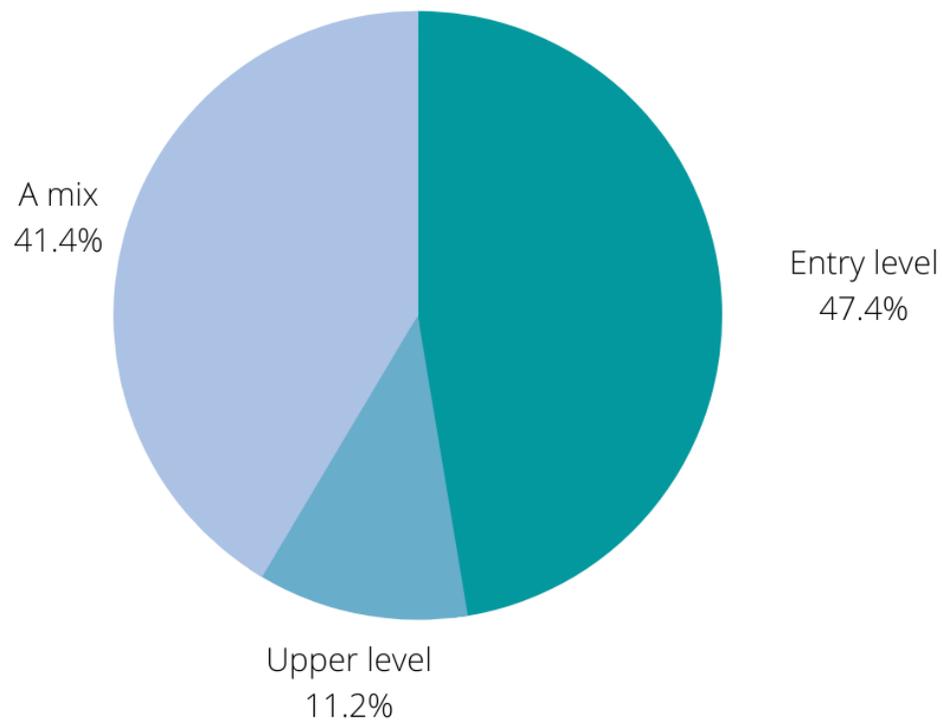


Figure 5. Pie chart of responses to the question: What level courses do you usually teach? Responses: Entry level, 47.4%, Upper level, 11.2%; A mix, 41.4%.

What discipline(s) do you teach?

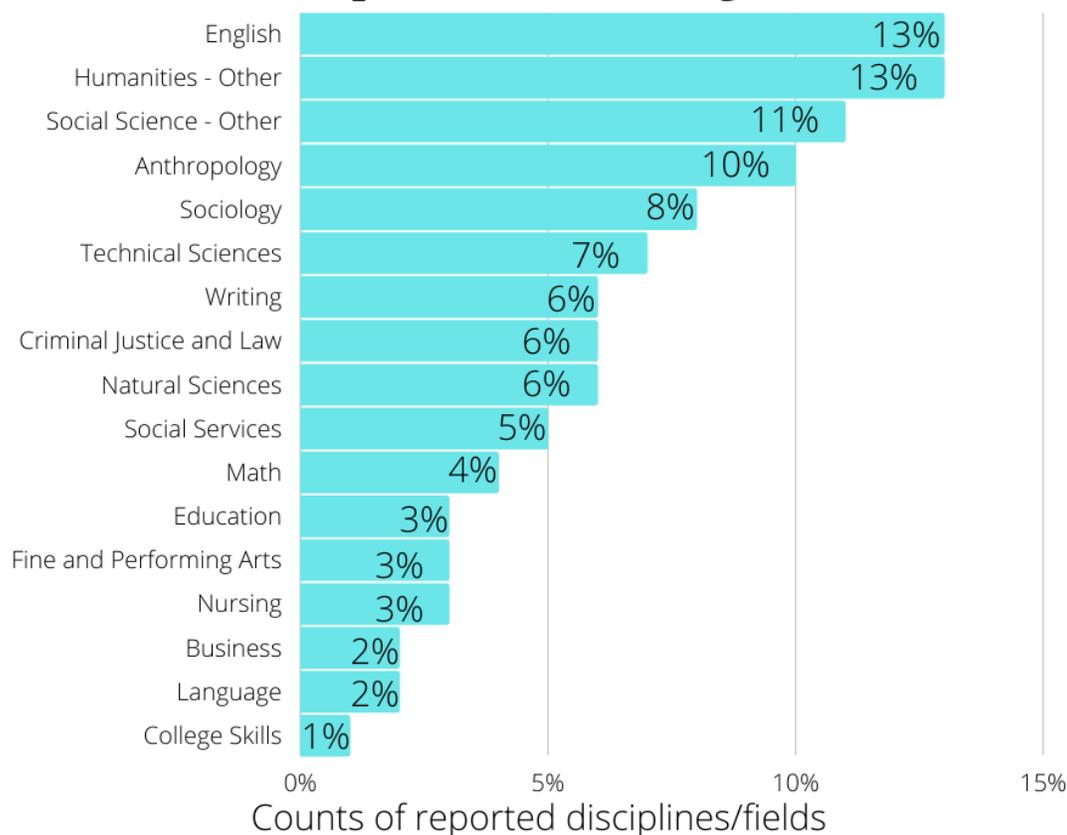


Figure 6. Bar graph of responses to the question: What discipline(s) do you teach? Results are aggregated from 152 open-ended responses. English, 13%; Humanities - Other, 13%; Social Science - Other, 11%; Anthropology, 10%; Sociology, 8%; Technical Sciences, 7%; Writing, 6%; Criminal Justice and Law, 6%; Natural Sciences, 6%; Social Services, 5%; Math, 4%; Education, 3%; Fine and Performing Arts, 3%; Nursing, 3%; Business, 2%; Language, 2%; College Skills, 1%.

To create this graph, we standardized the 152 responses to our open ended question: “What discipline(s) do you teach?”. Respondents who listed multiple disciplines were counted for each discipline they provided. For readability, we aggregated less represented disciplines into larger fields. For example:

- “Humanities - Other” includes Art History (3 mentions), Classics (1 mention), Comparative Literature (1 mention), Gender and Women’s Studies (2 mentions), History (3 mentions), Interdisciplinary Studies (1 mention), Irish Literature (1 mention), Literature (5 mentions), Philosophy (7 mentions).
- “Technical Sciences” includes Architecture technology (1 mention), Computer Science (6 mentions), Data Analysis (4 mentions), Engineering (1 mention), and GIS (1 mention).

Data Analysis

The 152 respondents provided long and detailed responses to the open-ended questions of the survey. To analyze their responses, we divided up the survey questions between the five researchers in our team. In April-May 2021, each researcher read a subset of the data. We overlapped to make sure the same responses would be reviewed more than once. During this first phase, the task was for each researcher to summarize the responses they had reviewed and identify recurring topics.

In June 2021, we regrouped to compare our respective summaries and impressions and began to collectively delineate broad themes. We went back and forth between the survey responses and the group discussions many times to make sure we were accurately understanding the responses. Specifically, we paid attention to what the respondents shared about their choices around syllabus-making, their classroom practices, their experiences with students and colleagues, their reflections on their working conditions, and their hopes for the future of the university. This process helped us to identify central themes across the responses.

We wrote this report in the fall 2021 and winter 2022, with numerous back and forth between our draft and the dataset. The following section presents the main findings from the study.

Findings from the survey

We have organized what we learned from the respondents into four central themes:

Theme #1: Why and how adjuncts and graduate students taught with free of charge materials in 2020.

Theme #2: Teaching at CUNY during and about COVID-19 pandemic, the imposition of austerity measures in higher education, and #Black Lives Matter protests.

Theme #3: Disability justice and educational access.

Theme #4: Outside of the classroom — on power, access to resources, and exploitation.

In this section, we successively present each theme. We try to faithfully convey the experiences and analysis of the respondents.

Theme 1: Why and how adjuncts and graduate students taught with free of charge materials in 2020.

Why they chose to teach with free of charge materials

Adjunct and graduate student faculty who taught with free of charge materials at CUNY in 2020 were motivated by economic, logistical, and pedagogical benefits.

- Increased adoption of free of charge materials **reduces economic barriers** to students accessing learning contents, often significantly. One educator noted: “I think education is a basic human right and that includes fully free course materials. Since students pay for this basic right, the least I can do is make the course materials accessible to all.” Another added: “Students already are paying and sacrificing enough for their education that I find the only fair way to balance this is to offer class materials at no cost to them.” Faculty cited that their students can’t buy costly textbooks. One respondent linked their decision to when they struggled to buy textbooks as an undergraduate: “I often had to buy \$400+ worth of textbooks per semester that I could not sell back, or received pennies for at best. I did not want my students to live through that same experience.”
- Logistically**, faculty recognized that free of charge classroom materials online could be more easily accessed, in general, and especially in the required distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Some faculty began providing learning materials free of charge for the first time during the pandemic. The internet was more reliably accessible to students than libraries, bookstores, or the mail, and it was easier to use PDFs and other digital materials in an online learning environment. At the same time, some educators identified setbacks to using free materials. One noted the inadequate technical support for students. Online instruction and material required students to have stable internet and a device that facilitated school work. Many instructors referenced their students struggling to read long PDFs without a printer. Courses were also reliant

on Blackboard, the learning management system that CUNY uses, which occasionally experienced navigation issues or would crash.

- **Pedagogically**, respondents found that by teaching with free of charge materials, or supplementing textbooks with them, students could apply research methods or theoretical concepts to topics that they were interested in. One educator’s comment underscores this point: “For those who teach emerging topics and need current state of the art information, the publication lag from traditional textbooks means material is 5 years out of date by the time it hits the press.” Another adds: “The freedom to choose dynamic contemporary literature pieces for my students that could showcase a range of voices and to show my students that reading can be enjoyable. I wanted to show them that we don’t have to abide by the literary canon or that what they read isn’t academic — that is, if critical thought is used then much of what we read can be academic.” Faculty explained that the cost isn’t even worth it for the pedagogical quality (one even arguing that “textbook costs are a scam”), and that free of charge materials were more varied than what textbooks offered.

They both *selected* and *created* free materials

Adjunct and graduate student faculty who taught with free of charge materials at CUNY in 2020 invested considerable amounts of time in both selecting and creating material.

Respondents selected free of charge materials from an abundance of textual and multimedia sources, both open access and proprietary:

- OER textbooks (OpenStax, the American Anthropological Association, American Yawp) or books in the public domain (Manifold, Gutenberg)
- Digital pirated copies of book chapters and articles
- Articles from open access peer reviewed publications
- Videos and Documentary (Youtube, MIT-OpenCourseWare, TEDTalks, CSPAN, PBS, Kanopy)
- News articles (New York Times, Wall Street Journal)¹⁷
- Open Access test banks
- Ad-hoc websites like Purdue OWL and the Khan academy
- Podcasts from NPR
- Archival collections and primary material through sites like Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, the Art Story, Smarthistory, the Library of Congress, and E-herodotus
- Softwares like GeoGebra, MyOpenMath, Webnote, and Datacamp
- E-books available through the CUNY library

Moreover, respondents listed the wide array of free of charge materials that they personally created:

¹⁷ CUNY students and faculty have free and unlimited access to *The New York Times* if they activate their account using their campus email address.

- Syllabi, course websites on the CUNY Academic Commons
- Course readers, glossaries
- Recorded lectures (video and audio), slide decks (pdf or powerpoints), written transcript of the lectures, summary notes.
- Educational videos, interactive exercises, VoiceThread Assignments, discord server
- Mid-term exams, multiple choice test materials, questions for synchronous discussions, sparking questions
- Study guide, review sheets, handouts, cheat-sheets
- Feedback surveys, questionnaires, polls

The decision to use free of charge materials is not all or nothing: 60 percent of the respondents said they taught exclusively with free of charge materials, the other 40 percent supplemented these with for-purchase materials.

Theme 2: Teaching at CUNY during and about the COVID-19 pandemic, the imposition of austerity measures in higher education, and #Black Lives Matter protests.

The majority of respondents recognized the importance of weaving into their 2020 syllabi COVID-19, austerity, and #Black Lives Matter-related teaching materials.

A central line of inquiry in our survey was whether/how adjuncts used free of charge materials to address the extraordinary events of 2020. In response to our questions about whether the respondents wove content related to COVID-19, austerity, and #Black Lives Matter into their 2020 classes, a majority (68 percent) affirmed that they included this material to varying degrees. The respondents' detailed replies about their pedagogical choices demonstrated how CUNY adjunct and graduate student faculty adeptly implemented curricular materials to engage with these entwined social and public health crises of 2020.

Some respondents highlighted that these three topics were indispensable to teaching in a public urban university like CUNY. One unequivocally emphasized, "If we are not including COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, or economic austerity in our lessons I'm not sure why we're even here."

On COVID-19

Respondents used free of charge materials to teach about the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Instructors reported using collaborative syllabi and other resources that were shared through

department email lists and social media. Many told us they incorporated articles from news media, such as the New York Times, into their curriculum. Others brought in government reports, datasets, and connected the COVID-19 pandemic to lessons on the pandemic of 1918. Respondents characterized these sources as being more timely and easier for students to understand than traditional academic sources, like journal articles. As one respondent shared, “students told me they were glad to read and respond to these materials, whether in composition or creative writing courses — they wanted a space to think, write, and talk about the pandemic.”

The following list of replies give us an insight into the varieties of ways instructors addressed the issues of the COVID-19 pandemic in their courses:

- In a Social Psychology class, they “[explained] the growing number of discrimination against Asian/Asian-American during [COVID] — I found some free educational materials on the internet and showed them to students.”
- “I drew heavily on academic anthropology blogs and other sources that publish more quickly than traditional journal articles, and made them available as part of student research assignments”
- “I used story maps that were free to map the spread of covid-19 as well as to document people's various stories with regard to the crisis.”
- “This was quite easy, as our school's website created a section and compiled sources. But because we knew about COVID-19 much less last year, the list was not as extensive. It was a good teaching moment about popular vs. academic sources, however. I also came across an instructor's coronavirus syllabus that her student shared in an NYC Facebook group, where everyone had access to contribute OER and textbook sources that address public health crises, past and present.”
- “Last semester I incorporated a small unit about the ecological impacts of the pandemic into one of my lectures”
- “Found limited materials, although addressed the crisis from a human behavior point of view (refusal, government trust/control, etc.)”
- “I used lots of institutional reports and articles from different government agencies, UN, health organizations, and sites of universities that provided open access to articles discussing social and environmental aspects of [COVID]. My students were also asked to search for material and some of them included articles or reports from NASA, from the UN, etc.”
- Finally, a Computer Science professor who had not made any change in their syllabus for the pandemic noted that students took the initiative to work with COVID data for their final projects.

On austerity

Respondents gave examples on using free of charge materials to teach about austerity, some highlighting CUNY and New York City as a site of economic analysis/action. One shared a CUNY movement thesis (*The Struggle for CUNY*, by Chris Gunderson), and posted discussion threads about “students having to pay full tuition” while experiencing pandemic-related disruptions and thus “receiving a much lower quality education in return.” Another discussed austerity at CUNY via student debt, adjunctification, etc. Others shared resources from Free CUNY and the Professional Staff Congress (PSC-CUNY) website. An Urban Anthropology class discussed the retrenchment of the NYC budget. Others broadly focused on austerity in the U.S. and longer timelines of political economy and electoral cycles, showing U.S. maps that visualize unequal wealth distribution, using Studs Terkel’s *Work* interviews and David Graeber’s *Debt: The First 5000 Years* to discuss political economy in the past and present, and analyzing the “moral panic to the elections — 1%, democratic socialism, and other terms that affect one’s perception of our government.” Others linked austerity with food insecurity, the pandemic, and environmental devastation, including the “systemic shortcomings that exacerbate the pandemic [and] climate catastrophe,” “how [the] pandemic structuralises and reformulates social inequality at global level,” and the “relationships and the impacts of zoonotic diseases on the economy.”

On race, racism, mass incarceration, and #Black Lives Matter

Overwhelmingly, respondents utilized free of charge materials in addressing race, racism, policing and mass incarceration in their teaching since the #Black Lives Matter resurgence in summer 2020. They sought out and incorporated their own online zero cost materials on racism, policing, the #Black Lives Matter movement, and the George Floyd uprisings. Respondents used crowd-sourced curricula created by the #Black Lives Matter movement. For example, one respondent noted: “I have drawn from the *#FergusonSyllabus* and *#CharlottesvilleSyllabus*, as well as other collaboratively-built resources to help address systemic racism and the BLM movement.” Other citations included Michelle Alexander’s *The New Jim Crow*, Mariame Kaba and Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s articles on abolition, James Baldwin’s “A Report From Occupied Territory,” Angela Davis’ *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, and the documentaries *13th* and *The Black Panthers: Vanguard of the Revolution*.

Altogether, a range of freely available material was rapidly adopted for the fall 2020 semester, including podcasts, medical journals, government documents, material on law enforcement, news publications, leftist publications, YouTube, student-developed materials, CUNY Struggle’s reader on racism and CUNY, municipal publications/reporting on housing data, and more. Additionally, some respondents also introduced material on law enforcement’s targeting of transwomen of color, Muslim activists, Latinx populations, and other migrant communities. Using freely available online materials allowed faculty to flexibly adapt dialogues to these historic issues of the year 2020.

At the intersection

Finally, respondents selected and created free of charge materials to put these three topics (the COVID-19 pandemic, austerity measures, and the #Black Lives Matter movement) in conversation with each other.

- For one educator, “‘Teaching During a Time of Trauma’ was part of our curriculum and I used articles and videos to address the ramifications of COVID-19 and #BlackLivesMatter in the classroom. I had a guest speaker on the topic of using Mindfulness techniques to regulate the students' states of mind.”
- Another educator shared, “During spring 2020, my class and I put together our own website of resources related to the pandemic and teaching. We were gathering these as they became available. During Fall 2020, I taught entry level courses that required a particular curriculum (e.g., basics of teaching), but I supplemented this curriculum with conversations around teaching for BLM and during a pandemic (e.g., we focused on reading and planning lessons for YA [Young Adult] novels that had BLM themes, like *The Hate U Give*).”

In addition to teaching about these three topics, some respondents also shared actual life-support and resources with students:

- “I focused on finding materials that helped [them] address the stress related to COVID-19, more so than information about the virus.”
- “I [...] provided students with a list of COVID-related resources that could help them find 1. COVID-related mental health support, 2. information about changes to unemployment and worker's rights and 3. financial resources such as housing resources, food banks, campus financial support programs. Most of this information was online through the department of health and other NYC and NYS websites.”

Some respondents were prevented from including these topics due to overwork, inexperience, and precarity.

Other adjuncts and graduate students who taught with free of charge materials at CUNY in 2020 struggled to incorporate materials that addressed these three topics.

- Respondents explained that they did not have the time to incorporate materials related to these topics into their courses and used the department model-syllabus: “I was hired a week before the semester began, so I didn't have time to be creative. [...] I could have tried a lot harder. Again, I was a last-minute hire.”
- Others were too overwhelmed to perform the additional work that tweaking their syllabi would require: “I found the transition to online teaching in March 2020 without any prior

training EXTREMELY stressful. So having to consider current social events as content material was just too much to deal with."

- The vulnerability of their employment situation also played a role in how the respondents addressed these topics in their classrooms: "I didn't [include materials that address issues of racism and policing] but should have. I teach at John Jay so I'm very nervous about leading police-related discussions and 100% need to get better at that. (I am definitely abolish the police but also teach actual NYPD members)."

Other respondents decided that these topics were either irrelevant or inappropriate for their class, or failed to substantively address power relations inside/outside of the classroom

On the opposite side of the spectrum, some respondents indicated that these topics were not relevant to their courses. When asked "Did you consider finding free materials that addressed the issues of: the Covid-19 pandemic, #Black Lives Matter demonstrations, and increasing economic austerity?" Someone replied: "computer science course, doesn't really apply" and someone else: "Given my field (foreign language) and the level I teach, I guessed there would be none." Others emphasized that they saw no need for such material within the CUNY learning environment. In one instance, a respondent stated, "I don't see too much racism in CUNY." Some respondents deemed racism and policing to be too political for the classroom.

Others decided against including such materials because they feared it would be a burden for the students:

- "I try to encourage students to stay away from recent events; I assume they hear enough about it outside of class."
- "I considered and used graphs from social media that dealt with covid, gender differences in covid's impact. I considered and discussed with my chair discussing Lisa Cook's work in the effect of lynchings on Black innovation but due to the elections and the traumatic subject matter. We decided it was too stressful to discuss this with students."
- "I taught some covid-related materials but mostly chose to avoid it since while some students will want to talk about Covid, many will not because [of] trauma."

In some cases, respondents explained that even though they did not address these topics in the course, reflections about these topics came up through student-led projects. This indicates that when students are given options, they may seize the opportunity to work on topics that are relevant to their lives.

Finally, while we asked faculty if they engaged with these themes, and what material they used, our survey did not ask respondents to reflect on their own position in the classroom. In some

cases, respondents brought this up on their own. While some respondents told us that they actively reflected on structures of power as they taught, others explained that their experience as white people was an adequate proxy for teaching about racism without a fuller analysis of how historical prejudice and geopolitical power produce racism. For example, one self-identified white respondent wrote about teaching “Global Geography, a subject I understand well from 30 years of travel to over 127 countries.” They noted, “Global Travel makes you confront your own prejudices. How easy it [is] for you to be a minority in a [place that is] culturally and racially different than [from] you. I remember once being in Ethiopia at a large religious festival. We were the only white people with thousands of [B]lack people. It was interesting to be stared at by the majority.”

These perspectives force us to think about classroom dynamics when instructors fail to analyze white supremacy and US-centrism in their pedagogy. Their underlying analyses pose a larger pedagogical question about how enduring racism, violence from the police, the defunding of public institutions, and the toll of COVID-19 are woven into CUNY classroom dialogues (or not) where the majority are working-class students of colors whose communities have been directly impacted by these issues. We offer further reflections on this in the concluding section of this report.

Theme 3: Disability Justice & Educational Access

Many respondents attempted to make their free of charge learning materials accessible to disabled students

Regardless of the challenges posed to CUNY’s teaching force in the university-wide abrupt move to distance-learning in 2020, many adjuncts and grad students who responded to the survey attempted to make their courses accessible to disabled students. Instructors were familiar with a range of concerns around making material accessible to disabled students, although 56 percent of respondents indicated they had not received formal training on accessibility.

Some respondents expressed familiarity with visual and hearing accessibility in providing education to disabled students. When asked whether they received training regarding accessibility guidelines, some referenced how specific platforms like Microsoft Word has a built-in accessibility checker, or that they “participated in CUNY’s Online Teaching Essentials workshop last summer, which discussed universal design and accessibility guidelines.” Respondents spoke about converting readings and PowerPoints (include scripts in PowerPoint notes and alt-text on images) to enhance accessibility, captioning videos with screen-reading compatibility software (like Screencast-O-Matic), and providing written transcripts of videos or audio recordings, as well as adopting WordPress’ accessibility widgets and plugins on their course websites.

One educator wrote, “If videos don't have captions I may include the link in a list of optional resources along with a note about no captions and try to find an article or other resources that covers the same information in the optional list too.” Regarding online lectures, another shared, “I record lectures and transcribe them with the help of Otter.ai, then post them to YouTube with the subtitles file, as well as posting the full transcript.” Another wrote, “I have been working with [a program] for close to 10 years in which we help students with impaired vision ready themselves for college, thus I have been trained in working with them via zoom, and how to send work as well as feedback in accessible ways.”

Confusion and shortcomings around “accessibility”

When prompted about issues around accessibility, many respondents replied with references to the economic realities of students and the importance of lowering economic barriers to access, citing cost as central to why they decided to teach with free of charge material. Even though our survey featured questions that specifically defined accessibility in terms of providing resources for disabled students, a significant number of educators only wrote responses that engaged with the theme of financial access. As one respondent shared: “When I was building the syllabus with free materials I was focusing more on financial accessibility instead of disability accessibility, and I didn't think about how my choice of learning materials might preclude some people from accessing the material until the syllabus had already been created.”

Some respondents did not appear to understand the range of concerns encompassed under a broader learning accessibility definition, and admitted that they had not really thought about accessibility. One respondent noted, “I have not encountered any issues, that I am aware of, regarding accessibility in my classes.” Another remarked, “If a student has an issue reading screens, they are already at a large enough disadvantage that I assume they will be in contact with the office of disability, the information for which is listed on the syllabus.” Again, another instructor noted: “as needed when informed by the office of accessibility or a student we use resources that are accountable to all students and their learning styles.” These responses represent a reactive approach to accessibility, which relies on students to self-identify to their instructors or administrators when they may need accessible materials for a course. A more proactive approach, in contrast, is to engage in some of the strategies listed above at the start of the course.

Additionally, many respondents stated that they scanned book chapters and provided them to students as free material. However, not all scanned book chapters and photocopied readings are accessible to disabled students who require screen reading software. Meanwhile, other areas of accessibility considerations, such as auditory or tactile learning styles were not represented in the sample responses.

Lack of institutional support

One survey question posed whether contingent faculty who decided to teach with free of charge materials in 2020 had received prior accessibility-related training on how to make their course accessible to disabled students. More than half of the survey respondents (56.72 percent) indicated that they have never received such training.

Multiple survey respondents noted concern with their campus' Office of Accessibility regarding their capacity to provide robust accommodations to students and training for faculty. One educator noted that they "usually meet with the accessibility office prior to the semester to better prepare," but several remarked the need for support with converting materials to have captions or to be compatible with screen readers.

Other respondents noted that when students are responsible for obtaining accommodations, they may have difficulty finding the Office of Accessibility, making an appointment that aligns with their schedule, and then conveying these needs to their professors throughout the semester. The following anecdote illustrates this experience:

As a TA of a class of over 800 students (they used to hold it in the auditorium), one student was blind and there were many videos and visual content that was difficult for her to comprehend. She would regularly attend my office hours, which were on the 12th floor in a very difficult to get to area of the building, and I know that she had to put in a ton of extra effort to access everything she needed, including physically being able to come meet me in my office. I do not think the main instructor made any changes, but I certainly tried to work with the student and audio record things with them. I have a lot to learn.

This lack of accessibility support for students is entwined with the treatment of adjunct faculty on an institutional level. Adjunct instructors face a contradiction: coupled with the precarity of adjunct labor, there is a built-in economic disincentive for adjunct faculty to make courses accessible on their own unpaid time. As one respondent argued:

The problem with being an adjunct is that any extra work you put in is not only not rewarded, but can actively work against bettering your overall position. I have considered creating my syllabus using Universal Design principles for example, but I just can't justify the amount of time it would take to do this properly. Now, suppose CUNY somewhere established some kind of 'Accessibility Grant for Adjuncts' where adjuncts would be compensated for producing accessible materials or for attending a workshop[...] That would be great, but at the same time, by making being an adjunct slightly more tenable, it paradoxically also would be a bad thing, because it is in the interests of adjuncts to abolish adjunctification, not make it work a bit better.

Theme 4: Outside of the Classroom — on power, access to resources, and exploitation

Beyond the classroom, the experience of adjunct and graduate student faculty who taught with free of charge materials at CUNY in 2020 reveals contradictions in the institutional push to promote OER at CUNY, and speak to broader power dynamics in departments and the university at large.

Inside the departments

When asked about whether their department encourages them to teach with free of charge materials, some respondents reported feeling isolated as adjuncts, excluded from department-level conversations about pedagogy and teaching materials, or too overwhelmed to meaningfully participate in such discussions when they existed.

- One respondent shared, “There were departmentally required textbooks but I augmented them with zero cost open access materials,” even though “I have been criticized [on my professional evaluations] by full-time faculty for my innovative approaches.” The respondent explained that the department considers that only paid textbooks or journal articles are “worthy.”
- Textbook requirements pose another burden on adjuncts, as one instructor shared: “Many adjuncts don’t have an option to make these decisions and end up not qualifying for the support [funding for teaching with OER] because textbooks are assigned by the department.
- For others, the experience varies based on the campus. As one respondent told us, “I teach at two community colleges. One [department] is excellent with weekly advisories re training resources etc; the other community college, very, very little, if at all.”

Respondents provided a range of suggestions for changes at the department level, moving the focus of open pedagogy from the individual instructor to their department. One instructor encouraged departments to “establish a resource bank for the sharing of materials and fund their production among faculty.” The idea of a repository for materials and syllabi that use free of charge materials was a frequent suggestion, along with providing funding for the production of these resources, waiving textbook requirements, formally committing to Zero Textbook Cost (ZTC) courses, and including adjuncts in curriculum decisions.

Training, Funding, and Support

When asked whether they had received any educational training regarding how to develop or teach with free of charge materials:

- Over one-third of the respondents (37.5 percent) replied yes and indicated that they participated in OER-related workshops organized by the libraries or the teaching and learning centers.
- One-fifth of the respondents (20.00 percent) received some type of financial compensation.
- Two-thirds of the respondents (60.74 percent) taught with free of charge materials without receiving such training or funding. They were either unaware that such workshops and stipends existed, or knew about them but lacked the time to participate.

A number of respondents reported significant time required to convert traditional courses to free of charge as well as the time that goes into maintaining courses from semester to semester, time commitments that are not compensated for adjuncts. Instructors advocated for paid time and training for both using OER materials and ensuring that their courses were accessible to disabled students.

Importantly, instructors recognized the value of the pedagogical community at CUNY, highlighting its existing strengths and weaknesses. Regarding open-sharing information licensing and OER, respondents noted how resources at Baruch, City College, School of Professional Studies, and other CUNY campuses taught them about Creative Commons licenses, which encouraged them to ask students to consider this licensing with their own portfolios. “Self-Paced Best Practices for Teaching Online” and multiple-day OER workshops were also available at some CUNY campuses. Many respondents shared that campus librarians were greatly helpful in the process of identifying and curating resources, and expressed the wish to have known about their work and utilized their services earlier. As one respondent shared, “More support to the SUPPORTERS (like the department itself, to the CTL [Center for Teaching and Learning]) would probably go [a long] way.”

On the other hand, instructors reported feeling isolated from wider conversations about curriculum and pedagogy. One instructor told us, “I think there is no space for part-time adjuncts to come together as a community of educators at all. I think if we would have such space (with some regularity), we could address problems we face, but also learn about resources available such as Free Materials and OER.”

Whose responsibility to provide free open education — full university funding or further adjunct exploitation?

Respondents highlighted that developing and locating free materials is heavily subsidized by their uncompensated labor. However, free could have another meaning, where the institution shoulders the burden of cost rather than shifting it to instructors or students. As one respondent pointed out, “I’d love to see CUNY pay for printed course readers for English composition students, for example. Or pay for books! Students need to practice close reading, annotating, [and] absorbing complicated texts and arguments. I think this is easier when students read printed texts instead of screen reading.”

Some respondents also indicated that the responsibility for participating in the CUNY-led OER initiative, and opening their syllabi, course sites, curated lists of reading/viewing materials, and assignments may reinscribe or deepen levels of exploitation. Several feared that OER initiatives could make adjunct and graduate student educators irrelevant: if their appointments were terminated, departments would then be able to re-use their teaching materials.

We conclude our findings section with adjunct educators' words of caution that illustrate these contradictions:

- “I would just like to acknowledge the careful thought and effort that goes into curating syllabi based on free materials, especially those intended to reflect our commitments to social justice and help students learn about and critically engage with contemporary political and social issues. It's a joy but I think also an unacknowledged aspect of our labor.”
- “Adjunct faculty are already severely under compensated. We are not paid enough to prep for our courses, and teaching with free materials often requires additional prep. Faculty utilizing free materials should be paid additional for prep or given grants to supplement their extra work.”
- “Since adjuncts are only paid for teaching and office hours, the time consuming nature of seeking out, editing, scanning etc. free materials is a disincentive for busy adjuncts. It's so much easier to simply use a textbook. Also, conversion to free materials also means a redesign of a course, at least in terms of assignments, etc. Again, not popular with uncompensated adjuncts who already have a "standard" course they have been teaching with a textbook. Lastly, the copyright issue is truly a minefield and I don't know how strongly CUNY would "have the back" of an adjunct who misjudged how much was a permissible fair use and got sued by a textbook publisher. The more we do open access, the more I expect textbook manufacturers to seek to go after some professors to make an example of them.”
- “Being an adjunct is a perverse situation where one's personal investment in excelling as a teacher can clash harshly with the institutional and economic motives with which one is faced... I try to do what is essentially impossible, which is to try and work as hard as I can to obtain and produce accessible materials while also trying not to work so hard at it that I jeopardize my own academic career, financial well-being, or health.”
- “It is incredibly time-consuming to prepare materials... I am concerned that this survey itself will be used to come to the conclusion, ‘Ah, these adjuncts are real suckers because they care for their students and are willing to do all kinds of work that they are not paid for!!! That is great!!!’ If adjuncts admitted to you, as I have done, the amount of work we do for free, that is definitely a conclusion that people who have power over us because we need this work might come to. I am sure you [survey research team] don't have that intention and will not seek to exploit the admission of our vulnerability, but I wonder where this information will end up getting to beyond you, or how your report on what you read here will be spun or used by people above you.”

Concluding Thoughts

We, the authors of this report, are grateful for the generous participation of 152 adjuncts and graduate student instructors who entrusted us with their experiences and analyses by taking this survey. We are also grateful to work with our CUNY students, with whom we have practiced teaching and learning using free of charge materials in order to make CUNY more accessible. As part of our attempt to be accountable to our colleagues and students, we present the following series of recommendations directed towards administrators, librarians, teaching and learning centers, and professional development offices who have been involved in the discussion around “open” pedagogies at CUNY. Our goal is to highlight the contradictions around free of charge materials (including OER) that surface when we center the experiences of adjuncts and graduate student instructors.

These recommendations are indivisible, holistic, and critical to each other’s implementation.¹⁸ We offer them in a spirit of collegiality, knowing that some colleagues have been incorporating free of charge materials for much longer than us, and are well aware of some of these tensions. Read these recommendations as a contribution to deep discussion, solidarity, and collective action with the goal to make CUNY more accessible to our working-class students, including disabled students.

1. We urge that the institutional push for a large-scale adoption of OER be interrogated in light of broader infrastructural needs, and that the effort to make curriculum materials zero-cost to students not be divorced from the struggle for a free and fully-funded CUNY.

Our survey revealed the many benefits of teaching with free of charge materials. Faculty were able to provide their students with relevant, high quality educational resources, debunking the myth of free of charge materials as less rigorous or worthy. They taught using multiple modes of instruction, including videos, discussions, and lectures. They echoed some of the fundamental ideas of open access pedagogy, including centering students’ decision making. It is worth noting that CUNY students value free of cost educational materials, and have actually been at the forefront of advocating for the reduction of textbook costs well before the launch of the New York State OER initiative.¹⁹ However, our survey also revealed some of the contradictions that can arise in the effort to integrate free materials in the context of institutional austerity and inequality.

¹⁸ We take inspiration for this transformative vision of indivisible demands from the Brooklyn College Anti-Racist Coalition, whose own demands can be found here: <https://antiracistcoalitionbc.wordpress.com/our-demands/>

¹⁹ Scola, Nancy. “Joint Action on Textbook Costs By Faculty and Students at Brooklyn College.” *PSC CUNY*, March 2013, <https://psc-cuny.org/clarion/march-2013/joint-action-textbook-costs-faculty-and-students-brooklyn-college>.

The faculty we surveyed were proud to lower the financial burden of college by teaching with free of charge materials, echoing CUNY and broader discourse that one benefit of OER is saving students money.²⁰ While we share our colleagues' concerns for college affordability, we worry that the focus on the cost of materials elides the many other economic barriers to education, such as tuition, food, housing, transportation, technology (including phone and internet), childcare, and healthcare. This is not to say that we see focusing on the cost of materials as necessarily exclusive to other issues. Instead, we caution that the institutional push to develop the use of OER in CUNY classrooms poses the price of textbooks as the central problem students face, and frames OER as a solution to that problem. Indeed, OER has become an all-too-deradicalized and commodified buzzword, as we see in the rise of traditional textbook publishers who are now investing in the OER market. OER could easily be utilized as a "fix" to the economic issues in the neoliberal university, while excusing public responsibility to subsidize any of the costs associated with quality education.

This furthers the harmful framing of some costs as "educational" and others as "non-educational." However, the costs of students' day-to-day realities intertwine with their education — all expenses are educational, such as childcare, food, transit, rent and living costs, digital devices to access classes, internet, and the list continues. Often, adjunct laborers are positioned to fill these gaps, too, via providing referrals to food access programs, mental health programs, veteran services, the NYC One Shot Deal program, and more. Not only "educational" materials, but all of these costs should be publicly funded.

A comprehensive education requires infrastructural investment beyond OER across all CUNY schools. There are educational materials that cannot be converted to online, open, free forms like art supplies, science lab equipment, or in-person visits to sites of learning.²¹ Furthermore, for students to access born-digital or converted resources they must have access to laptops and the internet.²² Without funding for broader resources, OER can only provide so much to our students. We have seen in CUNY that if workers and students don't demand funding for basic tangible resources — safe and fully accessible buildings, functioning elevators and bathrooms, as well as butcher paper, dry erase markers, printers — then they disappear through recurring

²⁰ St. Amour, Madeline. "OER Can Save Colleges Money, Too." *Inside Higher Ed*, 20 February 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2020/02/20/oer-can-save-colleges-money-too>.

²¹ If an adjunct faculty member wanted to incorporate a trip to a museum into their course, who would be responsible for the cost of transportation and admission? Each student? The underpaid adjunct? The increasingly defunded departments, campus, or university?

²² During the onset of COVID-19, even though CUNY lent electronic devices and publicized internet service deals to some students, these resources were limited in their reach to only students who heard about these support programs. Anecdotally, we saw that many students still logged into classes on their phones, and the internet access was only free for 60 days.

"Resources for CUNY Students Amidst COVID-19 Closings - Swipe Out Hunger." *Swipe Out Hunger*, 11 March 2020, <https://www.swipehunger.org/cunycovid19/>.

state disinvestment.²³ CUNY funding is also stratified between community colleges and four-year “senior” colleges, as well as between its majority-Black and Brown four-year colleges (i.e. Medgar Evers and Lehman) and its colleges whose demographics were never fully transformed by Open Admissions (i.e. Baruch and Hunter). We fear that the cost-saving focus of OER in the context of these disparities could end up reinforcing long-standing racist and classist funding patterns at CUNY. Student access and success requires holistically and equitably investing in our schools. allows for greater pedagogical creativity and student access.

Another puzzle is that we (the five researchers) as well as many of our respondents cited YouTube as their go to provider for free of charge materials. It’s certainly a painful contradiction that we rely on an online platform owned by tech giant Google to access and share materials that are central to our liberatory pedagogy. Given the history of surveillance at CUNY, we must interrogate how educators’ choice of learning materials are embedded in the digital and material surveillance of students and their communities.²⁴ Google has partnered with government agencies like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) responsible for the detention and deportation of immigrants. With the CIA and the NSA, Google developed programs of mass surveillance that primarily harms communities of colors, notably Muslims. It is also known for its recent anti-union practices and usurping personal data.²⁵ Yet, so many of us rely on YouTube for teaching. We are eager to think with our students and colleagues about how educators and students can challenge the tech giants’ centrality in open access teaching, and support ongoing

²³ Reed, Conor Tomás. “Hot City: Realizing the Dream of a Liberation University.” *Verso*, 8 September 2020, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4848-hot-city-realizing-the-dream-of-a-liberation-university>. Pagan, Teona, et al. “It’s Time for CUNY to Say Goodbye to Cops: Fighting for a Free University.” *Radical History Review*, 17 November 2020, <https://www.radicalhistoryreview.org/abusablepast/its-time-for-cuny-to-say-goodbye-to-cops-fighting-for-a-free-university/>.

²⁴ The NYPD has deployed a massive surveillance apparatus against Muslim students at CUNY, with undercover law enforcement infiltrating student organizations, and CUNY personnel sharing student records in violation of the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). “Mapping Muslims: NYPD Spying and its Impact on American Muslims.” CUNY School of Law, March 2013,

<https://www.law.cuny.edu/wp-content/uploads/page-assets/academics/clinics/immigration/clear/Mapping-Muslims.pdf>.

Tarleton, John. “NYPD Spy Scandal Hits CUNY: Muslim Students Target of Profiling.” *PSC CUNY*, November 2011, <https://www.psc-cuny.org/clarion/november-2011/nypd-spy-scandal-hits-cuny-muslim-students-target-profiling>.

²⁵ Nesbit, Jeff. “Google’s true origin partly lies in CIA and NSA research grants for mass surveillance.” *Quartz*, 8 December 2017,

<https://qz.com/1145669/googles-true-origin-partly-lies-in-cia-and-nsa-research-grants-for-mass-surveillance>.

Brewster, Thomas. “Exclusive: Government Secretly Orders Google To Identify Anyone Who Searched A Sexual Assault Victim’s Name, Address Or Telephone Number.” *Forbes*, October 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/thomasbrewster/2021/10/04/google-keyword-warrants-give-us-government-data-on-search-users/?sh=6316c1b7c971>.

Feiner, Lauren. “Google, Microsoft plan to spend billions on cybersecurity after meeting with Biden.” *CNBC*, 25 August 2021, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/08/25/google-microsoft-plan-to-spend-billions-on-cybersecurity-after-meeting-with-biden.html>.

organizing against their racist, colonial, anti-workers practices. Our dependence on such platforms must be an opportunity to bring these conversations to the classroom, and support the development of large-scale open-source alternatives.

2. We urge that all efforts to make curricular materials zero cost center the contemporary urgent issues relevant to CUNY students, and include conversations around instructors' positionality in the classroom.

We were heartened to read that many respondents created and used free materials to address these critical issues in real-time during their teaching in 2020. To teach about the pandemic, economic crises, and resurgence of a mass anti-racist movement for Black lives as they were unfolding demonstrated the principled, compassionate agility of adjunct faculty to navigate and learn with our students about this period of global uncertainty and social protests.

However, we see that using free of charge materials may not inherently be a panacea for addressing the complexities of our contemporary moment. Instructors who turn to institutional OER repositories to select learning resources for their syllabus will encounter materials produced in the same social contexts of Eurocentrism, racial supremacy, capitalism, language violence (imposed English monolingualism), and ableism as proprietary resources. These social contexts inform curriculum building across disciplines and colleges, and OER are not immune to them.²⁶ There may be a dearth of OER materials from African, Asian, Black, Caribbean, Indigenous, Latin American and Latinx, Middle Eastern/North African, and Pacific Islander histories and methodologies.

We need to think about what is included, excluded, underdeveloped, or suppressed from OER repositories, and how the push to adopt OER might coincide with the ongoing pressure to adopt and teach with Eurocentric materials. At the same time, some faculty may alternatively argue that OER doesn't give students access to the "classical canon," which we challenge as a limiting, and racist, pedagogical concept. We should also be critical about initiatives that claim to address these issues but only superficially "diversify" the canon without challenging systems of power. We can also welcome the emergence of digital ethnic studies initiatives, while critically inquiring why they are sometimes framed within a lexicon of national security.²⁷

One way to enrich the collections of free materials (including OER) is by turning to the CUNY archive of anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist pedagogies. CUNY educators can adopt learning resources [some listed in the appendix] from the Brooklyn College Anti-Racist Coalition (ARC), Cross-CUNY Working Group Against Racism and Colonialism, CUNY for Abolition and Safety, Free CUNY, and Rank and File Action. These groups (and more) have developed critical

²⁶ Wynter, Sylvia. "Do Not Call Us Negros: How Multicultural Texts Perpetuate Racism." San Francisco, CA, *Aspire*, 1994.

²⁷ See: DEFCON (defense readiness condition) is an alert state used by the US army and also the acronym of a recent Mellon-funded digital Ethnic Studies initiative at Salem State University. Laidler, John. "Salem State leads effort to expand digital ethnic studies." *The Boston Globe*, 22 October 2021, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2021/10/22/metro/salem-state-leads-effort-expand-digital-ethnic-studies/>.

frameworks that can be used in all departments to address vital issues of white supremacy, anti-Blackness, settler colonialism, and patriarchy.²⁸ As we do this, we must remember that BIPOC, femme, queer, and disabled faculty are particularly at risk of being discredited and marginalized by the institution. As former CUNY educator Carmen Kynard notes, we must be vigilant to counteract barriers and retaliation against BIPOC scholars who attempt to change CUNY's white-washed and white-colonized curricular content.²⁹

Our survey respondents repeatedly shared that they valued the flexibility that teaching with free of charge materials gave them. This added flexibility can also be used to build solidarity in the classroom by designing syllabi to address issues directly impacting CUNY students, such as extensive food and housing insecurity (see section "During the Year 2020" above), the NYPD surveillance of Muslim students in the 2000s, and concurrent military recruitment including the return of Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC).³⁰ To provide more depth, in 2011 it was revealed that undercover NYPD officers had infiltrated seven CUNY Muslim Students Associations (MSAs).³¹ The revelations of this sprawling surveillance enterprise have had devastating consequences on the education of Muslim students at CUNY. According to interviews, some students became hesitant to participate in campus activities, self-censored in classrooms and in their papers for fear of being recorded or misconstrued, and had their college experience poisoned with mistrust and suspicion against their own classmates or professors.

In this entwined context, CUNY educators — both contingent and non-contingent — have the responsibility to address these issues and make classrooms safer for Muslim students, as well as to resist the re-militarization of CUNY, and to critique how students' food and housing needs are not met. Across courses in the humanities, social sciences, and STEM, the curation of solidarity learning materials is one way to facilitate collective reckoning with the CUNY administration's complicity in the surveillance and oppression of Muslim students in the last two decades, alongside the predatory targeting of CUNY students for military recruitment as they navigate deeper economic deprivation.

Another way to approach this issue is to encourage faculty to reflect upon centering our students' opinions, experiences, and expertise in the making of syllabi and course catalogs. CUNY students have demanded changes to the curriculum; for example, in 2019 the Latinx Student Alliance at Lehman College sent a letter to the English Department to demand the

²⁸ Anti-Racist Coalition at Brooklyn College, <https://antiracistcoalitionbc.wordpress.com/>.

²⁹ Kynard, Carmen. "Letter to My Former College President and Provost: Why I Left - Education, Liberation & Black Radical Traditions for the 21st Century." *Education, Liberation & Black Radical Traditions for the 21st Century*, 12 November 2019, <http://carmenkynard.org/letter-to-former-college-president-and-provost/>.

³⁰ Glück, Zoltán, et al. "Organizing Against Empire: Struggles over the Militarization of CUNY." *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, vol. 58, 2014, <https://berkeleyjournal.org/2014/10/20/organizing-against-empire-struggles-over-the-militarization-of-cuny/>.

³¹ For years, law enforcement had crept into student-only spaces on CUNY campuses to monitor the daily life, community events, and political activities of Muslim students. The CUNY administration still has not taken accountability for not protecting its students, nor provided reparations. Theoharis, Jeanne. "I Feel Like a Despised Insect: Coming of Age Under Surveillance in New York." *The Intercept*, <https://theintercept.com/2016/02/18/coming-of-age-under-surveillance-in-new-york/>

reduction of the number of British-focused literature course and the addition of Latinx literature and African American literature to the core requirements of the literature major path, as well as the hiring of more diverse faculty and student input in the hiring process.³² The English Department faculty, in an open letter addressed to the English Students and Alumni and signed by 50+ faculty, “recognized the urgent need to redesign the curriculum with you, our Lehman students, in mind” and began revising the curriculum.³³

Despite these wide initiatives and ongoing student demands at CUNY, our study shows that some instructors believed that the themes of COVID-19, austerity, and #Black Lives Matter were not relevant to their courses, and therefore did not consider including materials that addressed them. While faculty associated this decision with the nature of their class content, the survey results did not show a relationship between the exclusion of these themes and the instructor’s discipline. The precarity of contingent faculty at CUNY should not obscure the fact that CUNY adjuncts are predominantly white who teach a majority of non-white students, which often results in racist classroom dynamics when whiteness and US-centrism remain unexamined. In this context, the survey responses invite us to center race and class analysis in all of our pedagogical practices. In particular, we encourage white adjunct and graduate student faculty to think reflexively about how their social positions (including race, gender, class, and ability) influence their teaching at CUNY, and for this reflection to happen at a systemic level as well.

With further regard to analyzing instructors’ positionality, more demographic information on respondents’ backgrounds would have been helpful in contextualizing whether their identities shaped what they deemed relevant in the classroom. Survey respondents almost never included aspects of their identity in their responses. Perhaps this meant that participants really did not find their background and social location to be relevant to the pedagogical questions we asked. After completing this project, we now wish we had taken a slightly different approach to asking about respondents’ backgrounds. Our decision came from an understanding that we could not make conclusions or generalizations about how these identities shaped pedagogical experience given our small sample, and that we want to avoid naturalizing constructed differences. From the few exceptions where respondents did bring up their identity in their responses, and from our own reflections as teachers, we suspect we might have received different results had we primed respondents to consider and share aspects of their background. We think this could have been achieved by asking participants to tell us about their positionalities and their teaching styles. Doing that would have helped us to better explore how educators’ experiential identities are intimately tied to the ways we teach.

³² “Lehman College’s Latinx Student Alliance Pens Letter Demanding Diversity in English Department Curriculum.” *Latino Rebels*, 21 November 2019, <https://www.latinorebels.com/2019/11/21/lehmancollegestudentletter/>.

³³ “Letter to English Students.” *Lehman College English Department*, 9 June 2020, https://www.lehman.edu/academics/arts-humanities/english/documents/LettertoEnglishStudents-6-9-2020_.pdf.

Rationale for New English Curriculum - Fall 2020.” *Lehman College English Department*, <https://www.lehman.edu/academics/arts-humanities/english/documents/RATIONALEforwebpage.pdf>.

3. We urge CUNY to immediately halt the underfunding and understaffing of its Offices of Accessibility, and prioritize supporting disabled students and faculty, including contingent faculty.

The marginalization of disabled students, especially in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic should be a central concern for anyone interested in making college courses more accessible.

Our survey reveals that while many adjunct instructors attempt to make their courses accessible to disabled students, they are often overwhelmed by or unaware of all that this entails. This is not a mark of individual failure of adjunct instructors but instead should be understood in the context of institutionally-enforced ableism at CUNY. Ensuring that courses are accessible to disabled students requires added labor beyond what adjuncts are compensated for. Offices of Accessibility across campuses face the same shrinking-budget problems that affect all of CUNY. It is imperative for CUNY to increase funding for its Accessibility Offices, retain qualified staff, mandate paid disability-focused training for all faculty, and compensate faculty (especially adjunct and graduate student educators) to convert their classes to Universal Design and other disability-centered models. These efforts must follow the expertise of disabled students and faculty advocates.

Beyond the need for fully-funded Offices of Accessibility and compensated faculty training, CUNY must also develop accommodation policies for students who are immunocompromised in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. CUNY temporarily granted accommodation requests to faculty and staff who requested to work remotely for medical reasons, but did not offer the same to students.³⁴ As of spring 2022, there has not been institutional approval of remote attendance as a disability accommodation for students. This has resulted in limited access to learning for immunocompromised students since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and has further impeded educational justice at CUNY.

CUNY's inadequate response to COVID also reinforced the racialized logic of barring access to quality higher education to Black and Brown working-class students. Due to historical marginalization, institutional neglect, redlining, and underservice, the prevalence of medical conditions that present greater risk for severe COVID-19 illness is higher in Black and Brown working-class communities. These communities are also more likely to work as essential workers and therefore be exposed to the virus — even during times of lockdown.³⁵ To center the

³⁴ It is important to note that CUNY did not allow such accommodation for CUNY workers who lived with disabled and/or vulnerable household members. Individuals are embedded in families and communities and that needs to be taken into account. CUNY only stated that in such cases, employees could request leaves of absence. Source: <https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/hr/covid-19-and-employee-accommodations> (last accessed on Jan 11, 2022). This link has been removed from the CUNY website, but is still accessible via <https://web.archive.org/web/2022011210816/https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/hr/covid-19-and-employee-accommodations/#1599754153809-2d421665-7dc9>. CUNY's current COVID-19 accommodations policy can be found here:

<https://www.cuny.edu/coronavirus/flexible-work-arrangements/#1619704749225-f638bf39-aa80>.

³⁵ "COVID-19: Prevention and Groups at Higher Risk." *NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene*, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/covid/covid-19-prevention-and-care.page>.

needs of disabled and immunocompromised students also means to take into account long-standing classist and racialized patterns of vulnerability.

Increased funding for both accessibility/disability offices, converting adjunct faculty positions into tenure-track lines and student-centered accommodation policies could benefit students, faculty, and staff who must all take the intersection of educational accessibility and racial justice focus seriously.

4. The end of exploitative labor conditions for adjunct and graduate student workers must be a starting point if we want to see transformative and liberatory pedagogical practices blossom.

For many respondents, the current institutional push to adopt OER did nothing to address the precarity of their working conditions: it only further exploits already-exploited adjuncts. For instance, adjuncts who receive stipends as part of the NYS-funded OER initiative are required to make their course site open access, share their syllabus, assignments, and reading packets. When adjunct or graduate student instructors are required to make their work publicly available, the institution takes advantage of their vulnerability. We — the five authors of this report — have witnessed and experienced first-hand how courses developed by CUNY adjuncts and grad student instructors have been appropriated by a tenured colleague, or a department. The requirement to “share” the products of one labor might be at the core of the OER ethos but it was not developed with the interests of adjuncts and grad student instructors in mind.

We echo the concerns of the respondents and fear that the adoption of OER by instructors and the multiplication of ZTC courses masks the multitude of ways that the university inadequately functions for its workers and students. Enduring precarity and withheld job security for adjunct and graduate student faculty impedes us from being able to strengthen our pedagogical work and make our classes fully accessible. Much of the work CUNY contingent educators do to include free of charge material in our syllabi, address the urgent issues of our time, and make course materials accessible for disabled students is unpaid and further deepens our exploitation.

Instructional and material support is crucial — the role of librarians, teaching centers, offices of accessibility, and paid time for non-contact hour curriculum creation should be expanded across CUNY. These initiatives must ensure that faculty (especially adjunct educators and graduate student workers) are fairly compensated. Many librarians are also adjuncts; they don't have job security, and are overworked and underpaid. The university should support all of our labor with job security, fair pay, health care, paid family and medical leave, and free childcare.

The decision to teach with free of charge materials must be placed within a broader reflection around the cost and funding of higher public education. We can envision a horizon in which all of CUNY — from tuition to textbooks — could be free and fully funded, and we can work together to reach it!

Appendices — Resources for Educators and Students

For the five of us, this study has reaffirmed the necessity of centering the needs of adjuncts, graduate students, and the students we teach. To this end, we recognize the importance of sharing resources horizontally with our colleagues and students. Below is a list of resources that we would like to share with you. We are very grateful to all the survey-takers who throughout their replies shared recommendations about teaching and learning materials that helped build this list.

1. Critical reads about the intersection of our working conditions and Open Educational Resources at CUNY

- Marian Stewart-Titus. [“The Road Scholars: Bronx Community College Adjunct Faculty Survey Report”](#)
- Marianne Madoré. [“We can decide what OER are for”](#)
- Andréa Stella. [“Science Writing and OER”](#)
- Michelle Gaspari. [The Adjunctification of Higher Ed](#) (forthcoming)
- Karen Zaino. The queer pedagogy of open educational resources. *Queering Sharing: Toward the Redistribution of Resources around the University*. (Mahn, Taylor, & Brim, eds.) (forthcoming)

2. CUNY-focused and CUNY-Created Open Educational Resources

- The Center for the Humanities. [The Puerto Rico Syllabus](#)
- Linda Luu. [“The Fight for Asian American Studies at Hunter College”](#) digital archival collection
- CUNY Struggle. [A Short Reader on Police, Protests, Racism, and Riots](#)
- [CUNY Digital History Archive](#)
- Conor Tomás Reed. [“Radiating CUNY Curriculum”](#) ongoing project that compiles digital learning materials related to CUNY movement histories

3. Collaboratively-built resources on anti-racism and policing

- [#FergusonSyllabus](#)
- [#CharlottesvilleSyllabus](#)
- [Prison Abolition Resource Guide](#)
- [Chicago University syllabus on defunding law enforcement](#)

4. Initiatives at the department level to share teaching resources

Here, we highlight two examples of faculty collaborations on developing syllabi and course reading packets. In these examples, tenured faculty take on the heavy lifting work, and share resources with their adjunct colleagues, while ensuring autonomy over the choice of educational materials.

- Brooklyn College English Department's Common Reader Project

The Common Reader Project is a recent initiative of the Brooklyn College English Department to engage students, staff, and faculty in provoking (in a good way) discussion. Every semester, BC faculty, students, staff, and administrators are invited to suggest open-access essays through an online form. The essays should invite a variety of opinions and be substantial both in subject and length (but no more than 20 pages). They must be available for electronic distribution and without copyright infringement. In addition to providing the essay's title and the author's name, the "recommender" must answer the following question: *"In a few sentences, please explain why this essay would engage the members of our diverse community."* At the end of the submission period, a committee of faculty from across the schools and members of the Brooklyn College staff reads the suggested essays and selects a number of them to create the semester's Common Reader. The Common Reader serves as an open-access curated list of resources faculty can use in their composition course, English 1010. According to the English Department, the spring 2021 Common Reader was discussed in other courses, and was, as well, the inspiration for a number of lively panel discussions to which the entire community was invited.

For more information, see the [Common Reader Project 2020-2021](#) (as well as [the submission form](#) used to collect suggestions).

- [The John Jay Justice eReader: An Open & Alternative Educational Resource](#)

The John Jay Justice eReader features a collection of key readings on justice. Gina Foster, Director of Teaching and Learning Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice explains: "By drawing texts from a variety of disciplinary and interdisciplinary areas of study, [the reader] will serve as a resource for John Jay faculty searching for classroom reading materials, as well as for those seeking to broaden their disciplinary expertise. By using material that can be accessed by our students without cost—including openly licensed and library licensed materials—it will serve the college's commitment to making education accessible "to traditionally underrepresented groups." In keeping with John Jay's identity as a Hispanic Serving Institution, it will include contributions originally written in Spanish as well as in English."³⁶

³⁶ Herrington, Vee. "The John Jay Justice eReader: An Open & Alternative Educational Resource." *Library News Blog*, Lloyd Sealy Library, 1 May 2019, <https://www.lib.jjay.cuny.edu/blog/john-jay-justice-ereader-open-alternative-educational-resource>.

5. Free of charge resources and tools that are disability-inclusive

- [Any.do](#) is a free app that allows users to organize and sync plans across multiple devices.
- [Bookshare](#) is a library of accessible E-books, which are available in multiple formats, for individuals with print disabilities. Bookshare is free for US schools and qualified U.S. students of any age and schools through an award from OSEP (Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education).
- [Braille and Audio Reading Download \(BARD\) \(2020\)](#)
- [Breathe2relax](#) is a free app that helps you remember to take time for self care and stress management
- [Creating Non Visually Accessible Documents](#)
- [Google Docs Voice Typing](#) is a dictation function for writing papers. The platform also comes with some voice commands. Users need a free Gmail account to access Google Docs.
- [Grammarly](#) offers spelling and grammar editing assistance through its browser option and through the Google Chrome app.
- [HowJSay](#) is an online, easily accessible pronunciation dictionary.
- [Non-Visual Desktop Access \(NVDA\)](#) is Windows software that announces text that appears on the screen, enabling users to interact with their computer without looking at the screen.
- [Online OCR](#) technology can help students overcome reading disabilities. Online OCR allows you to convert image PDFs to OCR format.
- [Otter.ai - Otter Voice Meeting Notes](#) provides transcription and audio notes for students.
- [Talking Books and Reading Disabilities \(2021\)](#)

6. Free of charge resources that provide disability education for educators

- [Association on Higher Education and Disability \(AHEAD\)](#)
- [The Arts & Special Education Webinar archive](#) is a free resource that supports arts learning for students with disabilities.
- [Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline](#) by RespectAbility (Webinar and reports). It is estimated that there are more than 750,000 disabled Americans incarcerated today.
- [A Framework for Inclusive Practices in Higher Education Publication and Accompanying Worksheet](#)
- [The History of Disabilities Webinar Series](#)
- [IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – History & Summary](#) – This video provides a simple overview of the history of IDEA and the struggles of students with disabilities to have the right to a free, appropriate public education protected by law.
- [Online Accessibility Resources for COVID-19](#)
- [Processing Together: Arts Education for Students with Disabilities during COVID-19](#)
- [Promoting #DeafSuccess: Guide for College and Postsecondary Programs](#)

- [Readings on Race and Disability](#) by Black, Disabled & Proud created by the [HBCU Disability Consortium](#) and the [Association on Higher Education And Disability](#)
- [Twenty Tips For Teaching an Accessible Online Course](#)
- [OER Accessibility Toolkit](#)