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Students in Shadow of Disaster

CUNY cutback plans add to feelings of loss

By Merle English
STAFF WRITER

Students and faculty at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, which lost a building and seven students in the World Trade Center disaster, say threatened budget cuts leave them feeling neglected and abandoned by government.

"We just started coming back to school," said Shana Joseph, a member of the school's student government and an editor at the college newspaper, SGA News. "We had to face all of that debris, that smoke, but we are buffeting back. Now we hear about budget cuts."

The college, which had to move its 17,000 students into a building that usually accommodates 8,000 after it lost the Fitterman Building in the Sept. 11 attacks, could face about $4 million in budget cuts because of state and city cutbacks, students and faculty said.

Those cuts, coupled with the deaths of seven students who worked in the Twin Towers, have left students feeling emotionally drained, Joseph and other students say.

Joseph said students are so angered by the proposed 15 percent cuts that they are planning a Dec. 13 protest outside City Hall.

James Blake, a professor of social work and counseling at the college, said 600 students have dropped out because they were overwhelmed by the sight of Ground Zero, which is visible from the college's remaining building on Chambers Street.

"They can't concentrate," Blake said. "They are full of fear. Some feel guilty they survived and others didn't. And no officials have come down here. Students don't see people coming to speak to them, console them. These black and Latino students are not getting the type of services they need."



Photo by Jennifer S. Altman

James Blake, a professor at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, stands in front of trailers being used as temporary classrooms. One of the college's buildings was destroyed in the Sept. 11 attacks.

Blake said the lack of support has left students and faculty "feeling neglected and abandoned."

Calls to the mayor's office for comment were not returned.

Mike Arena, a spokesman for the City University of New York, said the college "had the worst trauma of any college. They're right there."

He said Chancellor Matthew Goldstein walked through the campus and the outskirts after Sept. 11 to view the destruction and "from the beginning worked closely with the college to create the temporary classrooms and reopen the college."

As to the possible budget cuts, which would apply only to the community colleges, Arena said CUNY is negotiating with the city's Budget Division.

Students and faculty at the college would be the most severely impacted, Arena said, "because they suffered the most."

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