

Part of a pattern of assault on higher education

# Mass layoffs to hit New York City's New School next month

Sandy English  
14 May 2026

Next month, The New School in New York—one of the most prominent ostensibly progressive academic institutions in the United States—plans to conduct mass layoffs of up to 20 percent of its full-time workforce. The cuts will fall on faculty as well as staff, across finance, IT, HR and support positions, as the administration implements a sweeping restructuring plan to eliminate a \$48 million budget deficit.

The school announced potential layoffs in December. It offered a buy-out option to full-time faculty which only about 7 percent accepted. Now the school claims that it has no choice but to impose drastic staffing reductions. By the fall of this year, it aims to eliminate 400 to 460 positions, transition to a “two-college model,” gut student medical services, with full-time faculty facing a projected 15 percent reduction, devastating departments within Eugene Lang College and the New School for Social Research.

The New School was founded in 1919 by scholars—including several expelled from Columbia University for opposing US entry into World War I—who sought a genuinely critical institution outside of conventional academia. For decades it remained, as the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted, “a center of progressive ideas and opposition to fascism and militarism,” welcoming exiled European intellectuals fleeing Nazism in the 1930s.”

The administration attributes the deficit to, as President James Trowels said in November, “rising operational costs, federal funding cuts, and declining enrollment.” Faculty and staff, however, have pointed to opaque accounting that obscures diversions of funds from instruction to executive compensation and other administrative perks—Trowels, for example, makes \$1 million annually and lives in a university-owned townhouse in Greenwich Village which would rent for estimated \$20,000 to \$30,000 monthly. The Faculty Senate has demanded an independent audit and a moratorium on involuntary layoffs.

The central pillar of the university's austerity program is a massive administrative consolidation that effectively dissolves the operational identities of several historic divisions. Under this plan, the Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts and the New School for Social Research (NSSR) are being merged into a

single integrated unit, while Parsons School of Design, the College of Performing Arts, and the School of Public Engagement are being grouped into a secondary professional and creative arts cluster.

This consolidation is not merely an administrative shift; it has triggered the systemic elimination of academic offerings, including the discontinuance or “pausing” of over 23 majors and 16 minors across the university. These cuts have targeted programs deemed “low-enrollment,” with the Eugene Lang curriculum being hit particularly hard in areas such as Journalism + Design, Global Studies, and several foreign language tracks. These course cancellations will lead to job losses among the part-time faculty, who make up almost 90 percent of the total.

The academic contraction is also visible at the graduate level, where the university has implemented a “Ph.D. pause,” suspending new admissions for the 2026–2027 cycle across nearly all doctoral programs, including sociology, philosophy, economics and politics. By freezing these programs, the administration has signaled a pivot away from its historical identity as a “university in exile” for left-wing scholarship.

The present restructuring is not simply a repudiation of the history of The New School but is a part of a widespread attempt by university administrations across the United States to suffocate intellectual dissent on the campuses and align both scholarship and education with the ruling elite's program of war and dictatorship. This was most dramatically revealed by Columbia University's capitulation last year to the demands of the Trump administration to impose a regime of censorship on students and faculty.

That a similar process lies behind The New School's restructuring is best shown by the university's formation of a right-wing Center for the American Experience (CAE). While the administration has been close-mouthed about exactly what the orientation of the CAE will be and where its funding comes from, there is little doubt that it will be aligned with the right-wing accommodation of universities to the Trump administration. One of the CAE's co-directors, Natalia Mehlman Petrzela, publicly opposed an American Historical

Association resolution in 2025 that condemned the destruction of Gaza’s educational system.

Ryder Glickman, vice chair of the University Student Senate, told the student newspaper, the *New School Free Press*: “I think it is very calculated if you’re carving out education and all that’s left is a limited amount of departments and majors, coupled with this center, which is very ideologically driven, because there’s no such thing as non-ideological spaces.”

Faculty and students have taken several actions to fight back. They have held protests and delivered petitions to the administration. Recently, full-time faculty, who do not belong to a union, have sought to join the United Auto Workers to defend their rights.

Expecting the UAW bureaucracy to lift a finger on behalf of New School faculty, however, would be a grievous mistake. The union apparatus subordinates workers to the Democratic Party and the very corporate elite that they are now fighting. The UAW bureaucracy exists not to advance workers’ struggles, but to contain and suppress them, as its record among academic workers and autoworkers has shown repeatedly.

This is nowhere clearer than at The New School itself

- The UAW’s record at The New School is one of systematic betrayal. In 2018, approximately 850 SENS-UAW student teaching and research assistants struck against poverty wages while cafeteria workers simultaneously faced replacement by low-wage student labor. The UAW timed the strike for the post-class exam period to minimize pressure on the administration and staggered it to prevent solidarity with a concurrent Columbia strike. UNITE-HERE Local 100, covering cafeteria workers, did nothing beyond circulating a petition.

- In November 2022, 1,600 part-time adjuncts—with no raise since 2018—struck for \$14,000 per 45-contact-hour course. After four weeks of picketing, students occupying the University Center and 1,000 community members signing a no-confidence vote, the UAW ended the strike on a Saturday night without a worker vote, issuing only a 10-page summary. The deal settled at \$5,125–\$6,475 per course—half the demand—with raises consumed by 19 percent cumulative inflation, and a trivial job-security change. The UAW’s own representative fund was simultaneously increased 55 percent, from \$90,000 to \$140,000 annually. A no-strike clause was imposed, handing management a weapon against any future struggle.

- In March 2024, after a 94 percent strike vote and six months worked past contract expiration, the UAW permitted a three-day strike before announcing a “groundbreaking” deal—again without a worker vote. Wage rises touted at “24-31 percent” still left workers barely above the city’s \$16/hour minimum wage. Dental coverage was dropped, and another no-strike clause was embedded in the contract. The political motivation was explicit: suppressing the struggle ahead of elections in which UAW President Shawn Fain had lined up the UAW behind Biden, who the day before the shutdown had called Fain “a great friend and a great labor leader.”

The most revealing episode in the UAW’s recent suppression of academic workers concerns occurred at Columbia University in March, where the apparatus intervened not merely to block a strike but to dictate its political content—openly acting as an extension of the university administration and the capitalist state.

Following a 91.5 percent strike authorization vote by over 3,000 Student Workers of Columbia members, UAW Region 9A Director Brandon Mancilla—a Democratic Socialist of America member and ally of Shawn Fain—threatened the local with “receivership” unless it dropped demands the bureaucracy deemed “too political.” These demands included “cops off campus” and sanctuary campus protections for international students targeted by ICE

The inevitable conclusion is that workers at The New School need to build new organizations to defend themselves from layoffs and to call a halt to the reactionary restructuring of the university: independent rank-and-file committees. These would operate outside the no-strike clauses the UAW has embedded in every contract it has signed with the university, appealing directly to workers across New York City—academic workers at Columbia, NYU, and in particular transit workers, whose contact with the MTA expires this week—for the active solidarity the union bureaucracy has systematically blocked.

This perspective finds its expression in the campaign of Will Lehman, a rank-and-file Mack Trucks worker running as a socialist candidate for UAW president. Lehman’s platform does not seek to reform the UAW bureaucracy but to abolish it—transferring power and the union’s financial resources directly to rank-and-file workers under democratic control.

When the UAW blocked Columbia’s strike authorization in April 2026, Lehman declared the apparatus “management’s enforcer” and “complicit in political repression,” urging workers to seize the initiative independently. His campaign explicitly connects the suppression of academic workers struggles to the subordination of the working class to the Democratic Party and the bipartisan program of austerity and war. This program has never been more necessary for New School workers.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**