

**Testimony of the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY  
On the need for additional counseling services in  
FY 2009-2009 CUNY Budget Request  
Before  
The CUNY Board of Trustees on November 19, 2007**

**Delivered by  
Athurine DeSola,  
PSC Secretary**

Good afternoon Chairperson Schmidt, members of the CUNY Board of Trustees, Chancellor Goldstein, Vice Chancellor Malave and colleagues. Thank you for the chance to testify on behalf of the 20,000 PSC members and to ask for more money for counseling services.

We commend the Chancellor for including some new resources for advising and counseling, for career services and financial aid counseling – all essential services for students. But we are concerned that even with \$1.9 million added, the amount dedicated to expanding mental health services still falls far short of what is needed.

The PSC has lobbied for additional faculty counselors at CUNY. However the tragic events at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University on April 16 moved us – as it has moved the CUNY administration and most other colleges and universities – to take stock of the counseling support available to students. Last spring we asked the NYC Council to provide \$6.3 million for faculty counselors at CUNY community colleges and fund a one-on-one faculty mentoring program. This summer we surveyed our members and shared our information with Garrie Moore the Vice Chancellor for Student Services. He and his staff have been receptive to working with union to develop a comprehensive proposal, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with his office in the coming weeks and months. But we are concerned that the money allocated in the proposed 2008-2009 budget is inadequate.

The International Association of Counseling Services (IACS) defines minimum standards for college counseling programs to include, for example, the requirement that the counseling directors have a doctorate in an appropriate psychological counseling field. The IACS standards require colleges provide at least one trained psychological counselor to every 1,000 to 1,500 students.

CUNY colleges compare dismally to the IACS standard. Even using the minimum IACS standard of 1 licensed counselor to 1,500 students, our community colleges<sup>1</sup> have on average just one licensed mental health counselor for every 2,236 students. However, staffing levels are even worse at the senior, comprehensive and graduate and professional schools. Here the ratio is one licensed mental health counselor to 5,096 students on average.

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<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include either the staff or students in the College Discovery and SEEK programs.

By comparison, the ratio at State-operated SUNY campuses is 1:1,700. This is still below standard and for this reason the Task Force on Critical Incident Management chartered by Chancellor John Ryan last spring recommended hiring an additional 88 mental health counselors at State-operated campuses and 84 at the community colleges.

Frankly CUNY's ratios would be unacceptable on any college campus, but they are especially unacceptable at CUNY. If any students in the country should be provided with adequate counseling faculty, it is CUNY students. Statistically among the lowest-income college students in the nation, CUNY students face pressures unknown at many academic institutions. They hold down jobs, they support families, they contend every day with racism and poverty; they translate and mediate for parents, siblings and community. Close to a third do not have health insurance which severely limits their ability to get psychiatric care outside of school.

We in the Professional Staff Congress know our students are remarkably resilient. It is a tribute to their commitment to a college education that they co-exist at CUNY largely in harmony and stability. Imagine how much more these students could achieve, however, if they had the necessary support. A fully staffed psychological counseling service is important for students' success and for maintaining the safety of the campus community.

We look forward to working with Vice Chancellor Moore's office to develop a joint proposal for expanding mental health counseling services throughout CUNY. But we also strongly encourage the Chancellor and Trustees to include additional funds for this critical service in the proposed budget.

Thank you.