

Testimony of The Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
Before the
CUNY Board of Trustees on the Fiscal Year 2009 CUNY Budget Request
November 19, 2007

Delivered by
Steve London
PSC First Vice President

Good evening, Chairperson Schmidt, members of the Board of Trustees, Chancellor Goldstein, Vice Chancellor Malave and colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the 20,000 CUNY instructional staff represented by the Professional Staff Congress.

An Opportunity to Declare CUNY's Needs

The proposed 2008-09 CUNY Budget is presented at a time when Governor Spitzer has pledged to review the needs of public higher education in New York State and move in new directions. Finally, after years of budget loses, stalemate, or incremental gains, we may have an opportunity to make significant progress toward funding CUNY at appropriate levels and reverse years of budgetary decline. Let us not miss this opportunity to send a message about the realistic needs of CUNY and the city and state funding effort that will be required to truly make CUNY into a great university.

The 2008-2009 CUNY Budget Request: A Modest Increase In Public Funding

This year presents a political opportunity to make a dramatic break with the poverty budgets of the 1990s and the first half of this decade. The PSC believes this is the year to call on the city and state to make a bold move to correct the historic de-funding of The City University of New York.

The 2008-2009 Budget Request as approved by the Board of Trustees' Committee on Fiscal Affairs proposes a modest increase in state and city operating funds over the FY 2008 base budget. The requested increases of 8.6% in state funds and 5.4% in city funds will make only modest, incremental gains in public funding of CUNY and do little to reverse the historic inequality associated with past public funding trends. Most of the requested increases in public funding (3.8%) are to cover mandatory cost increases. The CUNY budget request only asks for an additional 2.2% in state and city funding for programmatic changes. While this proposed budget request begins to repair the real public disinvestment in CUNY, it does so at a glacial pace.

CUNY's budget request makes important advances in some areas, but, in the PSC's view, is still inadequate. We applaud the proposal in its commitment this year to seek:

- to hire 500 new full-time faculty, including 100 positions in the sciences;

- to add \$28 million for new science research facilities and programs;
- to improve student retention and graduation rates by expanding student services by \$8 million;
- to increase by \$1 million, resources for workforce development programs for working adult students;
- to upgrade CUNY's infrastructure to reverse years of deferred maintenance;
- to increase the state's contribution to community colleges by \$200 per FTE.

But, the PSC believes there is much more that can be done this year:

- ✓ full funding for all doctoral graduate students' tuition and health care.
- ✓ paid family leave to enable CUNY to recruit and retain faculty and staff.
- ✓ full funding for student mental health counseling needs at community and senior colleges.
- ✓ funding to convert long-serving adjuncts to full-time status to assist meeting net new faculty hiring goals;
- ✓ funding to support an initiative to increase the racial, ethnic and gender diversity of the faculty and professional staff;
- ✓ full public financing of the Compact Investment Program.

The CUNY Compact Sends the Wrong Message

The PSC joins the Chancellor and the Board in taking great pride in the accomplishments of CUNY students and the achievements of CUNY's faculty and professional staff. What often goes unsaid in the celebratory remarks, however, is that—year after year—students, faculty and staff are doing more with less. Work at CUNY is characterized by inadequate resources: not enough full-time instructional staff—faculty, counselors, or professional staff—to carry out the needed work with students; not enough office space, classroom space, working escalators, lab equipment or supplies to do our work effectively; not enough funds for travel to conferences, to engage in research, or advise students. The overriding experience of those of us who work and go to school at CUNY is that we are making heroic efforts on a daily basis to keep the enterprise of public higher education functioning.

The proposed “Compact” of the CUNY Budget Request sends the wrong message; that CUNY can build new programs with only a small marginal new net investment of public dollars. The “Compact” proposes that only 30% of the cost of new programs will be funded with public money and that the rest of the funding for Compact initiatives will come from tuition increases, enrollment growth, restructuring, and philanthropy. Restructuring and enrollment growth (15% of Compact funding) actually reduce resources and create new demands. Tuition increases (41% of Compact funding) add new financial burdens to our student body; making retention and increased graduation rates more difficult to achieve.

The FY 2009 budget request calls for a 5% increase in tuition this year and increases matching the Higher Education Price Index (HEPI) in the future. Since HEPI has averaged a 5% per

annum increase since 1990, the Compact, in practice, calls for endless substantial increases in tuition. The PSC does not support making current students pay for the historic disinvestment by raising tuition and fees. CUNY community college tuition is already among the highest in the nation. Many of our current students have difficulty affording CUNY tuition, especially since state and federal financial aid packages are not designed to meet many of our students' life circumstances.

The Compact's funding approach sends a message to those of us making the heroic efforts year after year that the Trustees do not understand the scope of the need for public dollars and the lack of resources facing the CUNY community. Furthermore, the "Compact" sends the wrong message to the public that minor changes in public funding at the margin will allow CUNY to deliver a quality education. If necessary programmatic changes must come, in major part, from tuition, enrollment increases, and restructuring, then many current students will ultimately be priced out of a CUNY education.

There is no substitute for public funding. The "Compact" proposed by the University Administration is essentially an accommodation to the culture of fiscal scarcity for public institutions and for higher education in particular. It is a proposal to find new sources of revenue and savings, tacitly accepting that state and city funding levels will not significantly improve.

Conclusion

Education is about the future; it is intrinsically an expression of hope. We, in the PSC, believe this year presents an opportunity to push higher education and CUNY to the forefront of the public agenda. We know that dollar for dollar, no investment goes further than funds for higher education. Every dollar invested by the city and state in CUNY results in 24 extra dollars contributed to the tax base.

We endorse CUNY's long-term goal of adding 2,300 net new full-time faculty. Let's work together and set our sights high. Let's work together to make this year the year of public higher education funding.