PSC Mass Meeting
October 30, 2007
Remarks by
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PSC First Vice President

Good evening. We are here tonight to share our thoughts about what we need in order to make CUNY a great university; a university that meets our needs so that we may comfortably engage in our professional pursuits and serve our students. We are also here to share a commitment to change the conditions that prevent CUNY from becoming a truly great university.

A well-worn slogan sums up what we know to be true. “Our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions.” Crowded, over-tallied classrooms, onerous teaching and work loads, poor laboratory facilities – especially in the Community Colleges – in which to do research, adjuncts running from class to class to make ends meet, and long lines at registration are just some of the conditions we and our students must endure. Compounding these difficulties are inadequate salaries that force us to stretch household budgets to pay for the rent or mortgages, childcare and other dependent care, or travel and other expenses for professional conferences.

Let us be honest; while we endure and make the best of these circumstances and serve our students well, we cannot do our best work and our students are not well served when our salaries and working conditions are substandard.

An indicator of these poor working conditions is the increasing difficulty we have in recruiting and retaining faculty. It has become more common to experience the frustration of a failed search because the first, second, or third choices are offered better compensation and teaching loads at other universities. Also, we are now experiencing a higher rate of turnover or “churning” as newly hired faculty leave for greener pastures.

This has not always been true at CUNY. CUNY was once known for high salaries and a good academic job.

I am here tonight to tell a sad tale; the story about how our salaries have declined over the past 36 years and how we have become less competitive, just as we are attempting to hire a whole new generation of faculty. Before we can discuss fixing the problem, however, we must thoroughly understand it.

One method to analyze salaries is to review the real buying power of salaries over time; in other words, to adjust nominal salaries for inflation. A second way is to look at average salaries at various institutions and compare them. Tonight, I will present you with a brief overview of both these approaches. We have presented CUNY with a very extensive analysis using both these methods.

How bad have our salaries gotten?

Let's start by looking at inflation-adjusted salaries over time (see below). What has happened to the top step of the Professor and Higher Education Officer titles? The current value of the top step is $102,000. If we had received raises to keep the top step even with the rate of inflation since 1971, today, the top step would be worth $162,000. That is a -37% erosion in real value.

SALARY STEPS HAVE ERODED IN INFLATION ADJUSTED DOLLARS

Steps and Title	Today	If Salaries Kept Pace With Inflation Since October 1971	Percent Decline
Top Step of Full Professor and HEO	$102,235	**$161,912**	-37%
Top Step of Assc. Prof. and HEA	$ 84,902	**$132,015**	-36%
Top Step of Asst Prof. And HEa	$ 71,732	**$107,838**	-32%
Median Step of Asst. Prof. and HEa	$ 53,046	**$ 89,718**	-40%
Bottom Step of Asst. Prof. and HEa	$ 38,801	**$ 76,776**	-50%
Top Step Lecturer	$ 64,933	**$ 88,786**	-27%
Bottom Step Lecturer	$ 36,595	**$ 65,749**	-44%
Top Step of Asst. To HEO	$ 61,365	**$ 88,786**	-31%
Bottom Step of Asst. To HEO	$ 32,197	**$ 65,749**	-51%
Top Step of Adjunct Lecturer (Hourly)	$ 69	**$ 109**	-36%
Bottom Step of Adjunct Lecturer (Hourly)	$ 59	**$ 98**	-40%

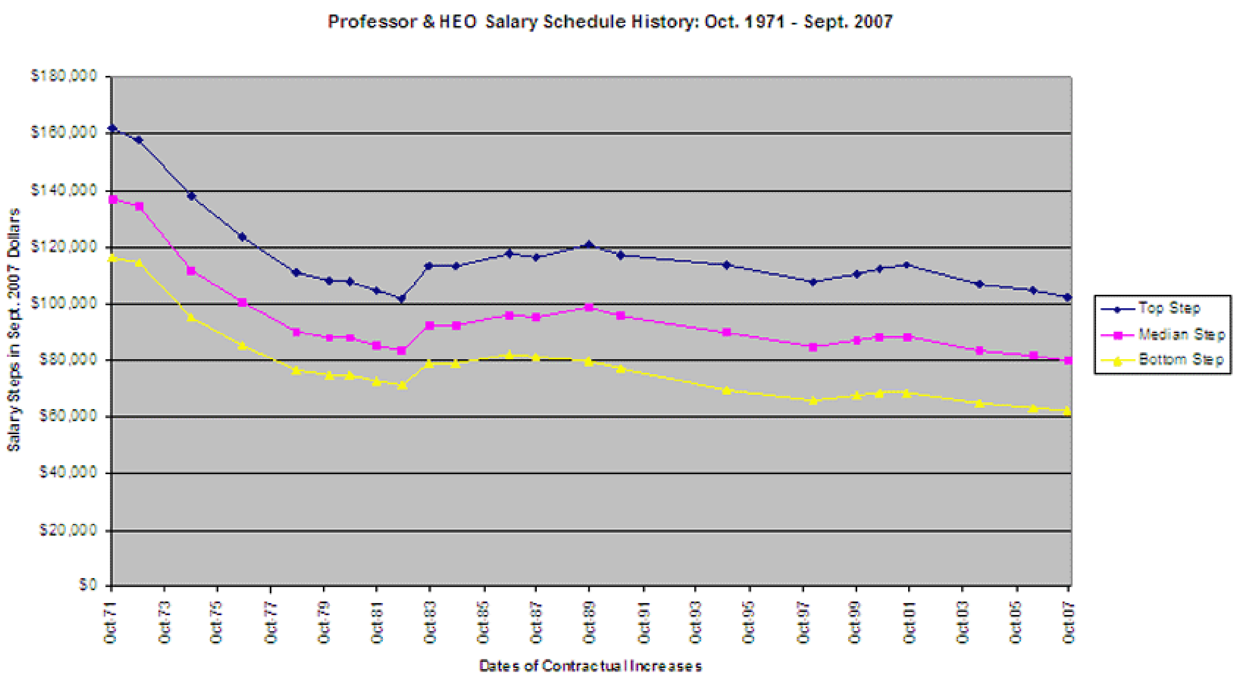
The top step of the Associate Professor and HE Associate titles have seen similar losses. (See above). The current salary is $85,000, but if we earned in real dollars what we did in 1971, we would make $132,000 today; that's a -36% decline.

The Assistant Professor and HE Assistant titles (see chart above) did not decline quite as much at the top, still a 32% drop, but our colleagues suffered severe losses at the median and bottom steps, -40% and -50% respectively. Those are due to concessions in the 1980s and 1990s that added steps to the bottom of the salary scale. Since this is the main entry-level title for faculty recruitment, it is not hard to see why recruiting has become increasingly difficult.

The top and bottom steps of the lecturer title (see chart above) and the top and bottom steps of the Assistant to HEO title tell a similar story. The top step of these titles did not decline quite as much as the others because of the equity increases of the 2000-2002 contract. But the declines are all the more difficult because the Lecturer title, like the HEO series titles are not promotional. In other words, once at the top step there is no other place to go.

And adjuncts, of course, were not immune from these trends (see chart above). If Adjunct Lecturer hourly rates had kept pace with inflation since 1971, adjunct lecturers would now be earning $109 per hour at the top step. That's nearly $5,000 per 3 credit course or, including the addition of the professional hour in the 2000-2002 contract, $11,500 for 6 credits of teaching.

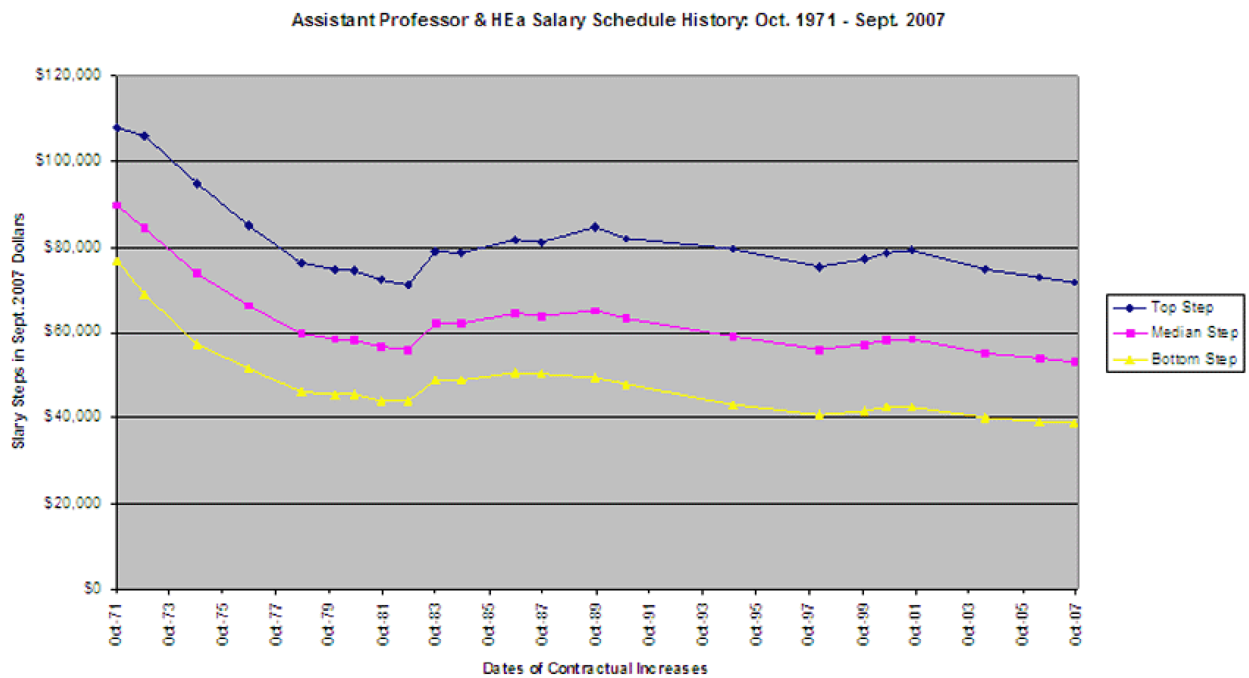
We all know how bad it is, and we certainly understand the impact on our lives of this salary erosion; but how and when did this erosion take place? (See below)



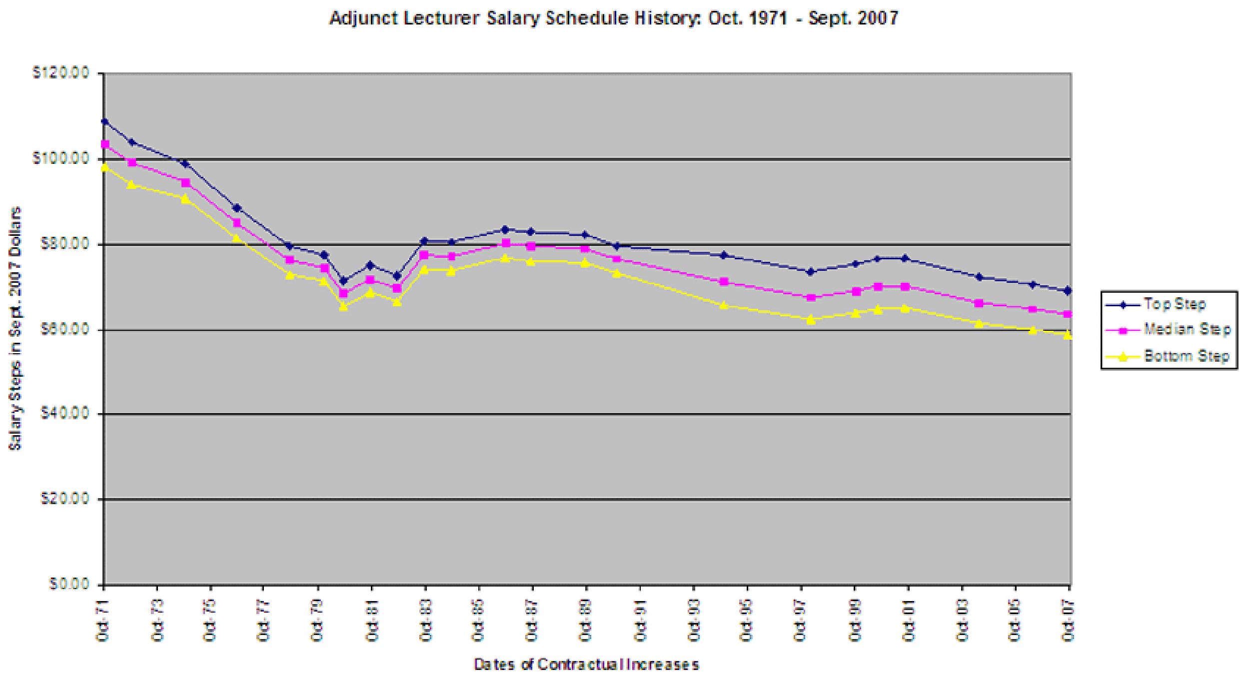
This chart shows what happened to the inflation-adjusted value of Professor and HEO steps over the period 1971 to 2007. You can see the top step in blue, the median step in red and the bottom step in yellow. There was a sharp decline in the value of salaries during the 1970s in the wake of the New York City Fiscal Crisis. During the 1970s and into the early 1980s, inflation adjusted salaries declined by 35% to 40%. In a sense, we have never recovered from the devastating impact of the fiscal crisis.

Salaries did rebound in the 1980s, only to be eroded again by the disastrous 1990s. We were able to reverse this trend in the 2000-2002 contract, but inflation during the period of the last contract brought the real value of our salaries back down.

A similar trend (see below) can be seen with other titles. Here you see a picture of the inflation eroded salary steps of the Assistant Professor and HE Assistant titles. Again there is the sharp decline in the 1970s. Also apparent are the sharper declines of the bottom and median steps in the 1980s and 1990s as new salary steps were added to the bottom.

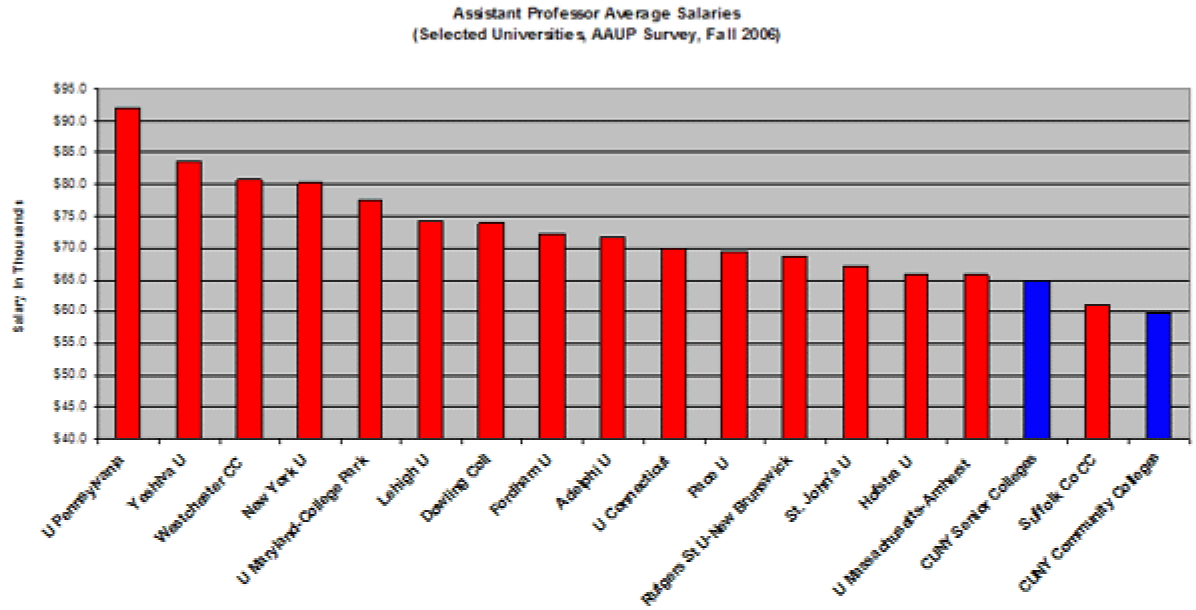


Finally, adjunct lecturers' (see below) hourly rates fell in the same pattern as everyone else.

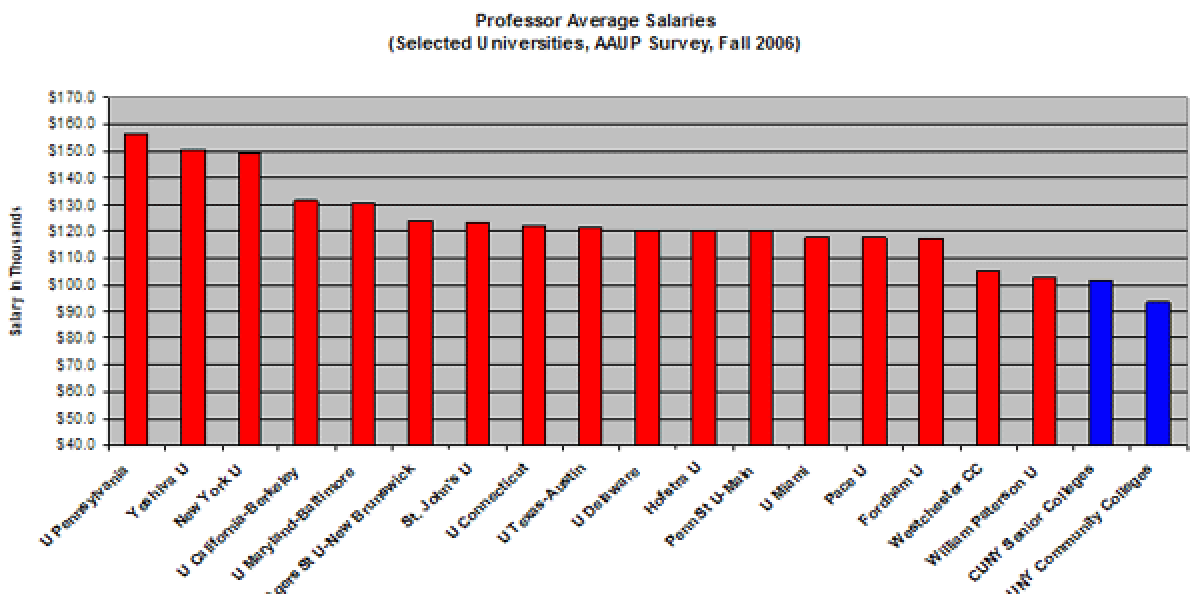


Not surprisingly, we were once very competitive and CUNY recruited an entire generation of faculty in the early to mid 1970s, many of whom are now retiring. Today, we are recruiting a new generation in much less favorable circumstances and in a much more expensive city.

The increasing difficulty we have in recruiting faculty to CUNY can be graphically demonstrated by comparing average salaries of Assistant Professors from various institutions. (See below). In this slide, I have selected a handful of institutions, both public and private, with whom we compete when recruiting new faculty. These institutions demonstrate how uncompetitive CUNY senior and community colleges have become (CUNY colleges are in the blue). (Actually, during negotiations, we presented CUNY with a list of over 200 such institutions.) Assistant Professor average salary among these competitors around the New York area is about $72,000, while CUNY senior colleges average $65,000 and community colleges average $60,000. At area schools like Westchester Community College, Yeshiva, Barnard, or NYU, Assistant Professors average over $80,000. Pace, Adelphi, Fordham, or University of Connecticut report average salaries $5,000 to $7,000 above our senior college average and $10,000 to $12,000 above our community college average.



The uncompetitive nature of our salaries can also be seen in the average salary comparisons for Professors (see below). Ours senior college Professor average salary is $101,000 and our community college average is $94,000. These averages include Distinguished Professors and over scale salary enhancements. Even so, CUNY's averages do not get us up to these comparable institutions, with many ranging from averages of $120,000 to $160,000.



The upper reaches of this range is where CUNY salaries would be if our salary steps had simply kept pace with inflation over the last 36 years.

As you no doubt appreciate, restoring our salaries to their historic highs is a big task, but not one that is impossible nor one that we should shy away from. Indeed, we must begin the process of recovering our competitiveness so that we may rebuild CUNY as a great university. We owe this not only to ourselves, but to our students and the generations of faculty and professional staff to come.

In this round of negotiations we have been successful in setting an agenda that brings a new focus on salaries. Management does understand that salary erosion is a real problem. But, their solutions differ markedly from ours. Management's bogus solution of replacing salary steps with so-called "merit pay" would benefit only a handful of faculty and professional staff; leaving the vast majority of us much worse off. Plus, it would undermine collegiality by giving presidents a pot of money to dispense at their discretion. This simply is unacceptable!

We need a good contract to restore the value of our salary steps!

We need a good contract to become competitive again!

We need a good contract that allows us to be our best professional selves and serve our students!

So I ask you –

What do we want? When do we want it?