

## New community college plan

# PSC members debate, discuss

This fall PSC members have been debating CUNY's fast-moving plan for a new community college. At the union's Delegate Assembly, in chapter meetings, and in countless informal discussions, union members have been discussing the potential impact of this initiative.

In a letter to members in October, PSC President Barbara Bowen wrote that while a new college could offer exciting possibilities, CUNY's plan raises serious concerns – especially because it is being marketed by 80th Street as a blueprint for broad community college “reform.”

The plans for the new college, Bowen noted, mention neither a permanent tenured faculty based at the college nor academic departments. What happens to academic freedom and faculty governance without these basic structures? The letter also raised questions about the narrowness of the curriculum and the possibility that the new college, in its relentless focus on standard measures of graduation rates, would sacrifice intellectual breadth for speed of completion. Bowen also questioned the strategy of showcasing a new college that will serve a relatively small student population when CUNY's existing community colleges are overcrowded and underfunded.

For links to CUNY documents on the new community college, full text of Bowen's letter and other analysis by union members, see [www.psc-cuny.org/proposedcc.htm](http://www.psc-cuny.org/proposedcc.htm) and [www.cuny.edu/academics/oa/initiatives/ncc.html](http://www.cuny.edu/academics/oa/initiatives/ncc.html).

The PSC is organizing a conference this spring that will aim to bring together the best thinking nationally on community college education, “to foster an informed public discussion that is both rigorous and imaginative.” In the meantime, here is sampling of what members have had to say:

### Felipe Pimentel

Assistant professor of sociology  
Hostos Community College

The controversies around the proposed community college can be summarized in two complicated questions. First, CUNY management has not been explicit enough regarding the structure of the college and how it would fit together with the existing system regulated by CUNY bylaws and the union contract. The union should not endorse this initiative until CUNY clarifies its new project.

Second, faculty and students in two-year institutions are concerned about the prospect of less resources being allocated to the existing community colleges, while the new community college becomes the University's main priority. We have six community colleges that need more support from the central administration. The creation of this new community college could divert resources that we need at Bronx, Queensborough, Borough of Manhattan, LaGuardia and Hostos Community Colleges.

### Ira Shor

Professor of English  
College of Staten Island & the  
Graduate Center

John Dewey's *Democracy and Education*, published nearly 100 years ago, is worth consulting as we consider CUNY's plan for a new community college.

Dewey denounced the vocational education then taking root in America. The grave danger he saw

was that “technical efficiency” would make education “an instrument of perpetuating unchanged the existing industrial order of society instead of operating as a means of its transformation.”

Dewey sided with labor against the 1917 Smith-Hughes Act for federally-funded industrial education, concerned that job skills would be taught “at the expense of meaning.” Unless average students were explicitly invited to think critically about their conditions in society, he argued that such vocationalism would only fortify “the socially obnoxious features of the present industrial and commercial order.” For Dewey, vocational education



was “illiberal and immoral” if it did not include a critical curriculum enhancing workers' ability to understand and act on policies that disfavored them.

In America today, community colleges have segregated working-class students into lesser vocational campuses producing more dropouts than graduates. While Americans generally accumulated more degrees than ever in the past 50 years, median family income of the bottom 60% has stagnated or declined. Expanding access to mass higher education has paralleled declining access to good-paying secure jobs for the majority, while the economy enriched the

top 5%. How will the curriculum of the new community college pose this central problem to students? The “solution” typically offered – get a degree or another degree to be more competitive in the “global market” – already weighs down millions who are storming the gates of two-year colleges. What else do they perhaps need to learn?

Dewey called for a critical curriculum of “economics, civics, and politics, to bring the future worker into touch with the problems of the day...and train power of adaptation to changing conditions so that future workers would not become blindly subject to a fate imposed upon them.”

To reach Dewey's goal, our smart and honorable colleagues at work on the new community college plan should reject a two-year unit operated mostly by overworked and underpaid adjuncts. The resources secured for this college should instead finance a full-time faculty unit with no tuition as an example for the future of CUNY – not a Potemkin Village showcase like the Macaulay Honors College. Grand old battered CUNY should build vigorous cultural democracy that pulls our degraded public life in a happily humane direction.

### Anne Friedman

Professor of developmental skills  
BMCC

This is a very complex project that has been in the works for about 18 months, and union members need to make sure that we are well-educated about it. People should read the documents on the New CUNY Community College Initiative website, as well as those on the PSC website.

I think we need to focus on what this proposal means for union rights and college governance. CUNY management has said that they will not violate the collective bargaining agreement – but when faced with questions about workload, the hiring process, full-time/part-time ratios, department chairs, tenure, academic freedom and professional autonomy, management responses have been vague and non-committal.

The community college planning team has not discussed issues of full-time/part-time/consortial faculty mix, and there are still no plans in regard to workload, whether or not there will be academic departments with elected chairs, whether faculty will be hired on professorial track lines, or what part newly hired faculty will play in structuring program, curriculum and graduation requirements. There are 13 working committees, and the 13th one is on governance – but that committee still has not been charged.



We should remember 80th Street's repeated efforts to remove department chairs from the bargaining unit, to hire increasing numbers of non-research faculty, and to create new non-tenure track titles in the contract, as well as its refusal to acknowledge CUNY's permanent part-time workforce by rejecting demands for job security. Given this history, management's silence on vital questions of union rights and faculty governance is extremely worrisome.

The School of Professional Studies (SPS) is headed by the same dean who is leading this new community college venture. Last Spring SPS had 147 faculty, of whom only four were full-time. They are distinguished lecturers on five or seven-year contracts and the rest are adjuncts. Some are adjuncts who have full-time jobs at other colleges, and some are adjuncts only. It is untrue, as management claims, that SPS's Personnel & Budget Committee is comprised of full-timers. At this school they are part-time, at-will employees. They are hired or fired by the school's dean, who is appointed by the chancellor. So the school's entire faculty is basically made up of adjuncts. They don't have departments, they have programs; they don't have chairs, they have directors. It's a school without tenure, which makes it a school without academic freedom.

So when the administration doesn't answer union and governance questions about the new community college, is it because they don't yet have the answers? Or because they have answers, which they know will raise protests from the faculty? We have been told, repeatedly, that “things will be different” in this new school, and this makes me wonder what they have in mind.

### Lisa Rose

Associate professor of human  
services  
BMCC

I am co-chair of one of the planning committees for the new community college – and my per-

spective is shaped in part by how I became a co-chair.

I'm involved in a research project with five colleagues across three of the community colleges, in which we're looking at the obstacles that young women of color face as they pursue a community college degree.

When I heard about the effort to create a new community college, I wanted those involved to know about our research. So I sent them an e-mail – and immediately I got an e-mail back saying, “Come and talk to us, tell us about your research.” Our research is faculty-generated, and funded by the New York Community Trust, a foundation deeply concerned about women in poverty in New York City. We met with the new community college folks and there was a genuine interest in our work. A day later they said, “We'd like you

### Vague responses to questions about governance

to chair one of our committees. What do you think?” And at that initial meeting I brought up the concerns the union has raised, which I share, about issues of governance, of tenure. The response I got was that they have no intention of violating the contract.

I also found that among those planning this new college there was a passionate interest in small classes, in small counselor-to-student ratios, and in true formative evaluation of programs. This was exciting and I jumped at the opportunity to be involved.

As co-chair of the committee on enrollment and persistence management, I have asked our committee members to think about both their dreams and their nightmares as we envision innovative ways to help students persist in community college. We are not shackled by the concept paper. Members have brought best practices from their home colleges into our discussion, which are often brilliant, and we've incorporated them into our recommendations.

Having said this, there are some potential deal-breakers that I hope the union will focus on, and those are of course tenure and faculty governance.

But I urge you to have an open mind about some of the other issues and to focus attention on them as well. For example, I agree that much of the national discussion about graduation rates and student persistence is narrow and uninformed. It came as a surprise to us, but our research indicates that the average age of first-time



freshmen is about 19. Overwhelmingly, the young women we interviewed do not have children, don't want to work full-time and are full-time students. Alarming, among young women of color at BMCC, for example, there is only one sophomore for every five freshmen. CUNY needs to serve these students better, and this new college gives us the opportunity to try new ways of doing that.

### Mike Vozick

Adjunct lecturer in biology  
BMCC

There is a danger that all the oxygen, all the energy, all the money will end up going to this new experimental college, while the existing community colleges will be seen as backwaters.

It's extremely important that we fight for parallel funding and parallel support for these six existing community colleges, so that they can also produce innovative programs. We need to make sure that innovation is CUNY-wide, and not only focused on one model program that is tailored to meet the needs of industry.

### Charlie Post

Associate professor of sociology  
BMCC

The way CUNY is selling this new community college and the way they're designing it, it's essentially a charter school for higher education.

The charter schools were sold to black and Latino communities, to

having only part-time faculty who don't have tenure rights," etc. They will use this as the cutting edge to go after the rest of us.

In our response, we have to make clear that we're in favor of educational innovation. And innovative projects can be done at existing community colleges, they can be done anywhere with a union contract, and in fact they'll be done better with people who are full-time and empowered.

What 80th Street is talking about is not educational innovation, but an attempt to smash the faculty union and smash faculty governance. And we need to be crystal clear on that.

### Steve London

Associate professor of political science  
Brooklyn College

As many union delegates have said tonight, there is a lot at stake in this new community college. But I'm not at all convinced that describing it as "a charter school" is useful. And I'm not convinced that this is at root an attack on our union. To simply say we need to squash this plan or we are doomed if it goes through overstates the case. These assumptions won't help us develop an effective response.

There are serious concerns that members have raised about this plan – but I'm concerned about the way in which some have talked about job training and vocational education. Too often in discussions of the new college, I've heard these



community college, but cut across the existing community and senior colleges as well.

In positioning the union in this debate, we need to think carefully about what targets we pick, about what is important to emphasize. For our union, the question should be how can the University best serve the people of New York City, not only for this new community college, but for CUNY as a whole.

### Lorraine Cohen

Professor of sociology  
LaGuardia Community College

Whether in a community college or a senior college, all of us are educating students in part for critical thinking, for citizenship, and so they can gain employment. Whether someone is an English major or a business major, both aspects of education are critically important. What kind of work will you do? And how will education change you? Both questions are central to the mission of any real college. So if our discussion sets up too much of a polarization between the liberal arts and vocational education, that is somewhat false.

But when I read Dean Mogulescu's recent talk about the new community college, it seemed to me that he was very focused on what the business community seems to emphasize, on what they call skill development rather than disciplinary knowledge.

We know that the best pedagogy in terms of developing skills is connected to broader disciplinary knowledge – especially if we want to develop skills not just for the jobs that exist today, but also for jobs that have yet to be invented. And it upset me to see that somehow that connection was missing in the way job training at this new college has been presented.

This connection is, in part, why our community colleges have a general education requirement. It does not matter whether you're studying marketing or biology or poetry, there is a general ed requirement that is part and parcel of every college so that we don't narrow students' education in a way that ultimately would not serve them well.

### Helen Mele Robinson

Assistant professor of education  
College of Staten Island

I'm working with the facilities and infrastructure planning committee for the new community college. I'm a CUNY product, and all three of my children have graduated from CUNY also. That gives me

the distinct perspective of viewing this project from the point of view of a student or a parent, as well as a faculty member. In our planning discussions, I see myself as an advocate for both the students and for the faculty.

My previous experience as an education director overseeing a nonprofit facility has come into play in my role as a committee member. As the committee begins to look at potential facilities, we are asking questions about classroom design, student traffic flow and office space. I think the CUNY representatives on the facilities committee are taking the comments and feedback of the committee members seriously. At this point I haven't seen any red flags thrown up that would make me question the sincerity of the process.

At this new college, students will have to go full-time, at least for the first year. I know not everyone can do that. CUNY has decided to take this approach because

out an alternate way of characterizing, describing, explaining, or naming the problem and possible solutions.

It's important to identify what in fact is going on. For example, those promoting charter schools in K-12 never mention the long history of under-investment in our public schools. So what we're left with is starvation and oasis. In the CUNY context, that means we have six other community colleges starving, and then we create an oasis on the side. And while

### Issues of curriculum, structure, workload

that oasis is an artifice – because we are not offered the resources to really reproduce it across the whole system – it is held up as a model and ultimately used as a Trojan horse for introducing increased managerial control, privatization, etc., within an impoverished system.

To focus our battle, we also need to understand that this debate is happening in a context in which public education and public higher education are being degraded.

### Rose Mary Colorafi

Former counseling coordinator,  
SEEK  
City Tech [2007-2009]

If students are given the choice to attend a community college that is very vocationally oriented and includes few liberal arts courses, enrollment and graduation rates at the other community colleges may eventually drop off. At the age of 18, coming from a low-income family myself, I might have chosen such a program in order to obtain well-paid work faster. That would have been a mistake for my intellectual, social, and civic life.

While today so much information is available quickly through various forms of technology, evidence of truly educated people and well-thought-out ideas seems to me to be on the decline.

Perhaps some compromise could be reached whereby the number of liberal arts courses required for an associate degree could be reduced for the new community college, but not narrowed as much as in the current plan.

### Nick Freudenberg

Distinguished professor of urban health  
Hunter School of Health Sciences

As a public health researcher and as a longtime activist, I am convinced that one important way for New York City to reduce its shocking inequities in health and educational achievement is to improve access to, and quality of, higher education. Community colleges provide important paths into four-year colleges and employment, and out of poverty. Even as an ardent admirer of the commitment and contributions of my colleagues in community colleges, I am convinced that our current approach to community college education needs substantial reform as well



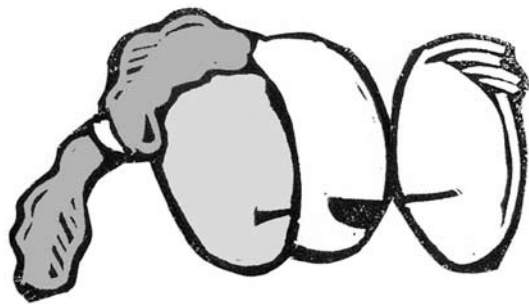
research shows that students who attend full-time are more likely to graduate. If we find things at this college that work, let's see how they can be replicated at other CUNY community colleges. For instance, how could we make it possible for more students to attend full-time? What kind of support would be needed to make that possible? During the process of creating this new college, hopefully these and many, many other questions will be answered on how to create an optimal learning environment.

### Mike Fabricant

Professor of social research & policy  
Hunter School of Social Work  
Executive officer, doctoral program in social welfare  
Graduate Center

It seems to me that you can't talk about this community college plan as though it's not shaped by its context. That context includes a set of conditions that exist in relationship to public education in this country, both for K-12 and for public higher education. What the University is attempting to advance is no surprise and it's consistent with federal policy. This is a steamroller that we're facing, in the same way that public school teachers in K-12 have faced a steamroller regarding charter schools and testing.

The mistake I think that unions in K-12 made was that they ceded the territory of innovation. They basically reacted to the agenda of testing and charter schools with-



Illustrations: Randall Enos

educational reformers all across this country by saying the problem with public education is not chronic underfunding, it's not racism in this society, it's not poverty, it's the teachers' unions. Teachers' unions are the problem, and the protections they have won that make the job tolerable, such as tenure, are the main obstacle to educational innovation.

That's what CUNY is saying here. And they're appealing to lots of well-intentioned folks across the University, promising to do good things for our students – but without making any clear commitment to a reasonable ratio of full-time to part-time faculty, without a commitment to academic departments, without a commitment to elected chairs and without a commitment to faculty governance.

They are setting up an experiment that will work well for a couple of years – and then they will point to those results and say, "We need to do the same thing elsewhere. We need to get rid of faculty governance, we need to effectively ice out the union by

terms mentioned in only a negative and derogatory way.

We need to take into account the real and persistent problems that confront people in this city who don't have GEDs, people who need job training. Workforce development is a very broad field and the existing community colleges do a good job at it. Many unions are very involved in apprenticeship programs and the like, and it's important for us to understand how CUNY as an institution could better serve people who may not be ready at this moment to enter into a liberal arts curriculum. It's important to understand how we can bridge that divide and how we can help them move into a liberal arts environment.

There's a lot for us to consider. It's true there are many dangers here, and the dangers have to do with an instrumental approach to education, a narrow understanding of graduation rates, misuse of testing, open access, the two-tier labor system, and so on. These problems are not new and are not unique to the proposed new com-

## New CC sparks debate

Continued from page 7

as significant new resources. Too many community college students fail to complete the degree and too many graduate without the skills for professional or higher education success.

I am participating in discussions about the curriculum and student services at the new community college, hoping we can learn lessons that can inform CUNY's – and other institutions' – approach to community colleges. I am especially interested in finding new and better ways for community colleges to serve as pipelines into better paying jobs in the health care sector and into health professional education. As a longtime PSC member and supporter, I am convinced that we can both contribute to educational innovation and safeguard our professional status in the University. The new community college provides an important forum for the University, for its management, faculty, staff and students to consider how CUNY can best fulfill its historic mission.

### Susan Saladino

Instructor in nursing [retired]  
CCNY

As a retiree of City College, I remember how the Goldstein Report of the 1990s heralded the closure of the City College School of Nursing. Since then, we have experienced a prolonged national nursing shortage and an even larger nursing faculty shortage. The closure of City College Baccalaureate Nursing resulted in a loss of about 100 graduating nurses per year from a program that greatly contributed to the number of minority nurses with baccalaureate degrees.

Instead, many more nurses of color graduate with degrees from community colleges. Nursing graduates with associate degrees do not easily complete their baccalaureate degree or gain entry to advanced practice nursing graduate programs.

We need minority nurses in leadership positions in nursing. Money should be directed towards increasing the number of nurses with advanced degrees rather than turning out more community college graduates who will only secure lower-paying jobs.

### Sándor John

Adjunct assistant professor of history  
Hunter College &  
Murphy Institute for Worker  
Education

I think we have a certain amount of empirical evidence accumulated as to what the administration of the University is pushing for.

We know that they are pushing to have more and more tiers in the labor system, and more and more tiers in the education that's offered to students. We know that they want to lower their labor costs,

and they also want to weaken the power of the union. We have quite a bit of accumulated evidence on each of these points.

I think that we've also seen, again and again, how the central administration likes to set up pet projects that then get special funding and over which 80th Street acquires special control.

I'm certainly in favor of people getting job training, or more support as they work toward their degree. But it's not far-fetched to



say that the administration has a consistent set of goals, and that it's quite likely that they are pursuing those goals as they construct this new community college.

If that's true, then we need to have an attitude of combative defense. We need to struggle for more, not less, equality; for more, not less, faculty governance; for more, not less, union power to defend the students and the workers and all of us at the University. And the administration is our antagonist in that fight – yes, they are.

### Carmen Solís

Associate professor, SEEK  
John Jay College

If the underlying goal of the planned new community college initiative is to attract some of the \$12 billion in funding for community colleges proposed by the Obama administration, or major grants from large private foundations, then CUNY is taking the wrong approach. Instead, it would be in the best interest of all our students to provide the existing community colleges with these much needed financial resources,

CUNY's community colleges and programs that enroll students with the most needs have consistently been underfunded. Limited resources in opportunity programs such as College Discovery in the community colleges and SEEK in the senior colleges, create larger counselor-to-student ratios and restrict the development of innovative programs that could better prepare students for opportunities that meet their real needs. With more adequate funding, all of our existing CUNY colleges could develop groundbreaking educational models, in smaller classes with smaller counselor/student caseloads, geared toward retraining and restructuring the workforce.

The responsibility of employment preparation should not be the work of one college. When we invest in all CUNY colleges, we empower our urban communities and uphold the dignity of all.

## RF workers keep up pressure

By JOHN TARLETON

Chanting “two percent won't pay the rent,” workers at the CUNY Research Foundation's Central Office picketed outside the RF's 41st Street headquarters during their lunch hour on October 22. Contract talks have now gone on for more than a year, but management is still dragging its feet on reaching a new agreement.

“All we are asking for is a fair day's pay for a fair day's work,” said Dawn Sievers, a member of the bargaining team who has worked at RF-CUNY for 23 years. The action drew 75 RF Central Office staff members and supporters.

Several veterans of the union struggle at the Stella D'oro bakery in the Bronx (see page 4) joined the demonstration. “They [the RF-CUNY workers] are fighting for their jobs and their benefits,” said Stella D'oro shop steward Mike Filippou. “We have the same interests as them. We are all working people.”

### UNIFIED

The day before the lunchtime rally, RF-CUNY workers flanked the hallway as management headed into the conference room to negotiate with the union. They held up signs reading, “My team speaks for me,” and “Strike Date TBA,” reminding management they were united in their commitment to fight for a fair deal.

On September 24 the RF-CUNY workers authorized the PSC to call a strike with a 91% “yes” vote and 83% of the employees voting. Speaking with *Clarion* before the October 22 demonstration, workers expressed frustration with management's low wage offers, especially in light of RF President Richard Rothbard's recent 44% salary increase.

“The president got a 44% raise and he wants us to take 2.75%. Why did he get such a high raise when we're the ones doing all the work?” asked Joyce Dehoney, who has worked at the Research Foundation for more than 20 years.

The Research Foundation claims Rothbard received a smaller raise, but has not explained why it reported the larger number on its IRS 990 forms.

RF management has been spending \$300,000 to \$600,000 per year on anti-union legal consultants – even though a 4% raise for RF Central Office staff would cost far less, at \$160,000 per year.

### SLIGHTLY BETTER

Though closely linked to CUNY, the Foundation is a private-sector entity and therefore is not covered by the Taylor Law, a New York State statute that prohibits strikes by public-sector employees. No strike date has been set yet.

Management did budge a bit the first week in November when it offered a four-year deal that would increase wages by 2.75%, 3%, 3% and 3.25%. As a part of management's

## Management begins to budge



Seventy-five RF-CUNY workers and their supporters march for a fair contract outside Research Foundation headquarters during lunch hour on October 22.

economic package, the employee contribution to health insurance premiums would increase from 17% to 18% in the second year of the contract and 19% in the fourth year of the contract. Union members said that management has to do better.

“My whole salary goes to the babysitter. There is nothing left for us,” said Boshina Krackowski, who has an infant daughter and an-

other child on the way. “Everything is getting expensive these days – transportation, gas, food, everything. We deserve a raise, not just management.”

“Everything is going up,” added Reggie Mack, who has worked for the RF for 24 years. “The subway went up. The price of milk is going up. Our health insurance is going up. What does that leave us?”

## PSC pushes CUNY on flu prep



PSC President Barbara Bowen testifies at a State Assembly hearing held on October 13 about CUNY's inadequate preparation for a possible outbreak of the H1N1 flu virus, commonly known as swine flu. Bowen documented the weaknesses in the CUNY administration's actions up to that point. To report swine flu preparedness on your campus, fill out a form available at [psc-cuny.org](http://psc-cuny.org).