When Governor Paterson called for deep mid-year cuts to CUNY’s budget, the union went into action. In less than a month, the PSC and its allies organized an emergency rally, gave legislative testimony, flooded Albany with faxes, fired up a media campaign and lobbied Senators and Assembly members in their home districts. Advocates argued that the budget-cutting would hurt prospects for New York’s economic recovery, and outlined alternatives for closing the revenue gap.

NEW RATES
Change period for health insurance
Members covered by the New York City health plan can choose HIP or GHI at no charge, or pay more to select another plan. You can change your choice until Nov. 30 – or wait until next year.

MEMBERSHIP
Are you sure you’ve signed a union card?
Some CUNY employees are surprised to learn that they’re not yet members of the PSC. To be a member, you must have signed a union card. To vote in chapter elections next spring, you must be enrolled by Dec. 1.

PARTY TIME
“U-N-I-O-N, & union was its name-o!”
In its last contract, the PSC became the first public-sector union in New York to win paid parental leave for its members. New parents brought their kids to the union hall for a celebration.

PSC & ALLIES ORGANIZE
STOP THE CUTS
When Governor Paterson called for deep mid-year cuts to CUNY’s budget, the union went into action. In less than a month, the PSC and its allies organized an emergency rally, gave legislative testimony, flooded Albany with faxes, fired up a media campaign and lobbied Senators and Assembly members in their home districts. Advocates argued that the budget-cutting would hurt prospects for New York’s economic recovery, and outlined alternatives for closing the revenue gap.
Race & hiring: Opportunity for all is crucial

I want to thank Clarion for the excellent reporting in the recent story on race and employment at CUNY.

As vice president for Cross Campus Units and vice chair of the HEO Chapter, I speak often with HEOs throughout the University. HEOs in the lowest ranks, where the highest concentration of people of color work, report the least opportunity for upward mobility. Many have worked for CUNY for more than 20 years, and some have master’s degrees and PhDs.

To recruit and retain people of color in all ranks successfully, CUNY must provide opportunities for advancement. Two major obstacles to advancement for HEOs are that colleges often do not fill positions from which higher-level HEOs leave or retire, leaving lower-level HEOs or classified service employees to carry the workload; and it is very hard for HEO-series employees to achieve reclassification to a higher title in their current department at their current college.

I hope that the PSC’s research project on CUNY and race will look at trends in reclassifications for HEO titles and how these relate to race.

Iris DeLutro
Queens College

Does focus on race divide?

● Re the October Clarion letters on race and employment:
  I do not think it is fair to assume that CUNY continues to discriminate against the hiring of “black faculty and other faculty of color,” as one responder put it. If the “examination of race” is a “strategic priority,” as another wrote, then what is the purpose of that strategy? To magnify, divide and segregate the differences among us?

My own allegiance is to America. I have not found solace in distinguishing my race from others and celebrating it or using it as a means to get ahead or achieve. I realize that there are times when that is necessary. But I also think the acknowledgment of race is a double-edged sword in these modern times. It leads to cronynism, elitism and ultimately reinforces segregation.

Racism makes me cry. It is the saddest and most animalistic act one could take against another. Such oppression should be avoided at all costs, especially when based on God-given attributes such as features and pigmentation. However, to charge that CUNY is a racist institution would be a discredit to all our distinguished professors who are white. There are persistent social mechanisms that perpetuate this kind of inequality, often more powerful than individual good intentions. Some call this structural racism, some call it institutional racism – and we need to better understand how this affects CUNY.

To achieve a colorblind university, we need to take action to end inequalities along racial lines. That starts with looking at and analyzing the racial consciousness that exist all around us. We can tackle this in union chapter meetings and committee meetings, in our departments and college senates. The union’s new project on CUNY and race is important, but it will make a difference only if we all think about this problem together.

Robert Mark Anderson
Queensborough Community College

Taking an honest look

● The September article on race and employment at CUNY is a good starting point for our union. Now we need a deeper discussion, and a sustained engagement in practical policy terms about racial inequality within our university. I would ask PSC members to think about the conclusion reached by Supreme Court Justice Harry Blackmun: “In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way.”

Despite talk of the US becoming a “post-racial” society, the reality is that pay, power and prestige are distributed unequally along racial lines almost everywhere you look. Certainly we have not arrived at a “colorblind” CUNY when 87% of our distinguished professors are white.

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Robert Mark Anderson
Queensborough Community College

Diversity & economics

● CUNY’s lack of progress in minority hiring is, I suspect, an issue of economics. Minorities are often less likely to take an HEO job to afford the salaries of our junior faculty if, for example, their old-fashioned ambitions include home ownership and children before the age of 40. They’re less likely to have the economic support outside CUNY to allow them scholarly research and a mortgage payment, both teaching and child care.

My brightest minority students at City Tech, all undergraduates, avoid careers that guarantee a decade or more of risky post-baccalaureate poverty. To achieve a colorblind university, we need to take action to end inequalities along racial lines. That starts with looking at and analyzing the racial consciousness that exist all around us. We can tackle this in union chapter meetings and committee meetings, in our departments and college senates. The union’s new project on CUNY and race is important, but it will make a difference only if we all think about this problem together.

Iris DeLutro
Queens College

Building HEO power

● There is ample evidence of the commitment of the Board of Trustees and the Chancellery to the goal of diversifying the faculty of CUNY. The chancellor has committed funding for this and made the goal clear. Yet the faculty demographics of some CUNY colleges remain remarkably little changed over the past decade, and in some cases there has even been a slight drop in the percentage of African Americans on the faculty.

From what I have observed and what I have heard, I can’t but conclude that the presidents and provosts and department chair have far less commitment to the goal of diversity. There are too many weak efforts that do not make effective use of the recruitment-sup-

port because the information is not made known, or there is a lack of imagination in the effort to secure promising candidates from minority groups. Is it racism? Well, it is less than an effective implementa-

tion of affirmative action.

As for retaining minority faculty, I think there is also little or no formal and effective effort to address whatever are the issues faced by minority faculty, with the result that CUNY loses some fine faculty talent that would otherwise extending a warmer welcome to us.

Philip Percorio
Queensborough Community College

Textbooks: preserve authors’ rights

● The September 2009 Clarion described three alternatives being considered by Senator Durbin on which to base legislation aimed at lowering the cost of textbooks. Briefly, two of them remove a textbook author’s control over future revisions that may be made by others. The third, called “No Derivatives,” gives the author(s) sole control of the work.

“Colorblind” society is the only option consistent with academic integrity. The other two open the door to purposeful or inadvertent detrimental impact on an author’s reputation. A textbook is the work of an author (or authors who decide to collaborate). Those who write the material in a textbook are entitled, when the copyright expires, to write their own textbook. With less labor they can earn a commensurate income for original or supplemental handouts, as well as assign library readings that serve these purposes. The instructor can utilize his/her own reading and thought in classroom lecture and discussion to attack or modify the text’s approach.

As the author of one text and co-author of another, I reject the notion that anybody should be free to meddle in revisions and updates of my work. Lowering the cost of textbooks to students is an important goal, but it cannot be done in a way that damages authors.

Gerald Handel
CCNY & the Graduate Center

Write to Clarion

Tell us what you are thinking. Letters may be on any topic, but must be no more than 200 words and are subject to editing. Send in your letter to pho genesis@pscmail.org.

Gary S. Choichet

News & Letters

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF
CUNY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 21 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. E-MAIL: PHOGENESIS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: (212) 302-7175.
PSC faces to block midyear cuts

By PETER Rogness

At the State legislature convened in mid-November to consider the CUNY and SUNY budgets, a group of PSC members are in the midst of a full-court press against Governor Paterson's proposal for deep mid-year cuts in State support for CUNY.

In a period of just three weeks, the union and its allies organized an emergency rally, gave legislative testimony, flooded Albany with faxes and phone calls, fired up a media campaign and lobbied Senators and Assembly members in their home districts.

The wave of actions carried a single message: Oppose the governor’s destructive cuts to public higher education.

PSC First Vice President Steve London testified before the Assembly Ways and Means Committee on October 21, while President Barbara Bowen appeared at a State Senate hearing the following October 26, drawing news coverage on NPR and local TV news.

“Years of accumulated disinvestment mean that CUNY today has few financial and human reserves. We are now bone and sinew,” London told the committee members. “Further cuts for an institution that is already stretched to the limit will have a much more damaging impact than those same cuts might have had twenty years ago.”

PATERSON’S PLAN

Because of lower-than-budgeted revenues, the governor says New York State faces a $5 billion deficit over the next two years. Paterson’s proposed Deficit Reduction Plan came in two waves. First, he proposed $500 million in state agency cuts. That was followed by a second wave of proposed administratively without seeking legislative approval. More than one-third of these cuts fell on CUNY, SUNY and student financial aid.

For CUNY, the governor sought to slash aid to CUNY seniors enrolled in October, in addition to proposed cuts in August, London told the Clarion: “Further cuts for an institution that is already stretched to the limit will have a much more damaging impact than those same cuts might have had twenty years ago.”

THE CUNY AND SUNY

savings have never been greater. It makes no sense – economically or morally – to cut the University now.

In the 1930s, Bowen noted, New York and the nation faced an even greater economic challenge, but the public policy response was bolder and more effective. “During the Depression, three new colleges were created for New York City,” Bowen said. “They had the forethought to realize that students who are flocking into schools, when parents want their children to have a better future, when adults are coming back to college in order to train for new jobs, that’s the time to invest if you really want people to thrive.”

The rally was co-sponsored by United University Professors (UUP) of SUNY and unions at SUNY community colleges, such as United College Employees (UCE) at the Fashion Institute of Technology, and was supported by NYSUT, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), and community-based organizations such as the Alliance for Quality Education and the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice.

UUP President Phillip Smith had strong words for the $80 million mid-year reduction that Governor Paterson imposed on SUNY, calling it outrageous, unacceptable and “beyond the pale.” Tens of thousands of college-bound high school students and community college transfers will be turned away from SUNY next year, he warned, because there won’t be enough courses or instructors to teach them. “Students at SUNY are SUNY dry, and the students will be the ones who will need a transfusion,” Smith said.

Union members urge legislators to invest in CUNY

Soaring enrollment requires more funds, not less.

Students already struggling with funding,” said Wolf, an assistant professor of biology at RCC. “The prospect of cutting even more money from our budget is scary...”

That point was amplified by testimony at the same hearing by Steve Allinger, legislative director for New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the PSC’s state affiliate: “Intellectual capital is what is driving economies around the world and is what our state needs to invest in to foster economic growth,” said Allinger. “Businesses are choosing to locate near great colleges and universities that can provide them with cutting-edge research and a skilled work force. These cuts fly in the face of this fact, and will undermine our economic recovery.”

THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE

Bowen’s Senate Finance Committee testimony emphasized that New York does have alternatives that make much more economic sense. “Use the Tax Stabilization Fund and the State Rainy Day Fund, which together offer $1.5 billion; eliminate the failed Empire Zone Program and save the State $600 million a year; end contracting-out to expensive consultants, and save the State another $730 million over the next three years,” she urged Senators. “And most important, go to Washington and demonstrate the need for an extension of state fiscal relief as part of federal action.” (See also page 12.)

Six days later, on October 27, hundreds of SUNY and CUNY faculty, staff and students, were joined by K12 teachers and community supporters in an emergency protest against the cuts held at Hunter College.

“Bronx Community College is already struggling with funding,” said Wolf, an assistant professor of biology at RCC. “The prospect of cutting even more money from our budget is scary. We’ve got infrastructure problems, we’ve got health and safety issues, we’ve got students who don’t have the resources that they need. So I came down to the rally to say all that.”

Paterson’s call for cuts is the opposite of what New York needs, Wolf told Clarion. “We’ve had a huge increase in enrollment, but in our department they didn’t hire any new faculty to deal with it,” he explained. “I’m sure it’s the same in other departments, and it’s a fantasy to think you can keep going like that. So we don’t need less money, we need more—that’s the reality.”

“CUNY cannot absorb any more cuts,” PSC President Barbara Baro- en told the crowd. “The University is already cramming students into overcrowded classrooms. Enrollment is the highest it has ever been, the demand for a CUNY education has never been greater. It makes no sense—economically or morally—to cut the University now.”

As Clarion went to press, the State Legislature met in a special session to consider Paterson’s proposed cuts. For latest developments, see www.psc-cuny.org.

Dave Sanders
**Hunter cafeteria workers win fair deal**

By CHARISSE WAUGH

Facing a boycott of the Hunter College cafeteria planned by the PSC chapter and student activists, AVI Foodsystems, Inc., finally agreed to a contract with Hunter College cafeteria workers in October.

The new agreement was ratified on October 30 in a unanimous vote. “It was wonderful,” remarked Debra Johnson, a Hunter College cafeteria cashier and an employee representative in negotiations. “All of our hard work paid off.”

The workers, members of UNITE HERE Local 100, began contract negotiations last August when AVI began providing food service at Hunter, and the talks turned contentious when AVI demanded that the workers for the first time pay union premiums for health care coverage, and switch their retirement plan to an AVI-managed 401(k).

On October 23, faced with a joint effort by Local 100, student supporters and the Hunter PSC chapter, AVI agreed to let the workers keep their current health care coverage. The agreement also calls for wage increases and a union-managed pension plan. “We are so proud of ourselves,” Johnson told Clarion. “They thought we would back down.”

**BROAD SUPPORT**

On September 8, the employees and Local 100 held a work stoppage in the middle of the lunch rush, which gained broader attention in the Hunter College community. On October 5, students and PSC members joined the workers in a rally outside of Hunter, with more than 150 people supporting the cafeteria union against AVI’s demands.

“One union leader called the closing of the factory “a defining moment” for labor in New York City. The PSC rallied in support of the workers, union president Barbara Bowen said, because “they offered a rare example of unbroken solidarity and militant resistance to a terribly inferior contract.”

In August 2008, management demands for cuts in wages and benefits provoked an 11-month strike by Local 50. He expects 20-30% of the workers to eventually land unionized work.

Workers at the Stella D’Oro bakery in the Bronx exit with their heads held high at the end of their final shift on October 8.

The Stella D’Oro bakery in the Bronx was closed on October 8, putting 136 unionized employees out of work. After a strike that lasted nearly a year and an extensive legal battle, the factory has been sold and much of the plant’s equipment dismantled and shipped to a non-union operation in Mexico.

The Stella D’Oro workers and their supporters were never promised back pay. "It’s such a travesty," O’Brien said. "We were happy that our clout was recognized. But the truth is, it’s about maintaining affordable health care; and AVI should be fearful of that," said Johnson, who has informed AVI that she will leave them if they negotiate again, won’t be able to say they’re broke, because I’ll know the truth.

**Brynwood won’t bite on Chavez buyout offer**

By JOHN TARETTON

The Stella D’Oro bakery closed down in the Bronx on October 8, putting 136 unionized employees out of work. After a strike that lasted nearly a year and an extensive legal battle, the factory has been sold and much of the plant’s equipment dismantled and shipped to a non-union operation in Mexico.

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Filippou said that Local 50 is fighting to make sure the Stella D’Oro workers receive full payment of the estimated $15 million they are owed, including $1.5 million in severance pay, $1.5 million in back pay from the strike, as well as another $12 million in pension and health care fund liabilities. Meanwhile, Filipppou added, nine former Stella D’Oro workers have started new jobs at bakeries in Queens, Long Island and New Jersey that are organized by Local 50. He expects $20-30% of the workers to eventually land unionized bakery positions in the New York area.

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Filippou praised PSC for its solidarity and the company’s efforts to provide back pay. "They were interested in showing solidarity — many cafeteria workers at Hunter have been working alongside us for the past twenty years," Gold said.

The president of the Hunter College Alumni Association, Pat Rudder, is also a member of the PSC. "At the full membership meeting of the Alumni Association, we deliberately used a non-AVI-ca
ter in support of the cafeteria workers," said Rudder, a pro
gen of English at City Tech.

"We were happy that our clout had helped in getting the workers a contract proposal that they could live with."

The workers’ biggest win in the new three-year contract was the continuation of free family health benefits for the life of the contract, including full employer contributions for this past August, September and October, when there was no agree

ment in place but talks continued. On wages, the workers will receive a $100 lump sum this year, followed by an approximately 4% hourly raise in 2010 and again in 2011.

On pensions, the result was a compromise. AVI will not maintain the defined-benefit pension plan that covered the workers when they were employed by Sodexo, the previous food service contrac
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timulated a pair of meetings with Stella D’oro shop owner Mike Filippou.

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Celebrating paid parental leave

Parents savor extra kid time

By JOHN TARLETON

It was the first time the PSC union hall had seen a gathering quite like this. Numerous balloons, toddlers crawling on play mats made of letters of the alphabet, their older siblings drew in coloring books, and parents shared stories about how a hard-fought union victory changed their lives.

The occasion was a Saturday morning party held October 24, to celebrate the eight-week paid parental leave benefit that union members won under the current contract.

UN Sheffield Hunter assistant professor of education Ann Ebe, whose first child was born on August 18, said that being able to be fully present when her child was born on August 18, said that being able to be fully present during her daughter’s early development had been invaluable.

“It’s been wonderful to be at home with her and see her develop and grow,” Ebe said. “A few weeks ago she began to smile and that’s huge. It makes it all worthwhile.”

Ebe said she will use accumulated sick leave and vacation time in addition to her paid parental leave to take almost a full semester off. Under the new policy, new parents can begin their paid parental leave as soon as they have used whatever sick leave they take for recovery from childbirth. “It would have been really hard on the students to have one person run three classes for half a semester and then have someone else take over with five weeks to go,” Ebe told Clarion.

María Franco, an assistant professor of mathematics at QCC, who had been teaching for 20 years, began to smile and that’s a few weeks ago. She said, “I think peace of mind is more important for new moms.”

When the paid parental leave benefit went into effect last March 19, parents of children born or adopted between July 17, 2008, and March 20, 2009, were eligible for a retroactive benefit in the form of eight weeks of paid parental leave, restoration of annual leave used for the purpose of caring for a newborn, financial compensation or release from teaching one course per semester for up to two semesters. Franco’s first child was born last December. Though she originally thought she would not qualify for the retroactive benefit, she says former QC Chapter Chair Jay Appleman “kept an eye on me” and put her in touch with people at the union’s central office, who helped Franco sign up for the retroactive benefit before the deadline expired.

“They were really good,” she said. "They did an amazing job.” As a result, Franco is teaching two courses this semester instead of three, following her daughter’s birth last December. She said this has allowed her to spend more time with her child while also preparing a first book for publication before coming up for tenure review next year.

New dads have also benefited from paid parental leave. LaGuardia Associate HEO Suraj Singh said paid parental leave not only allowed him to stay at home with his new child, but also to take on a greater load of household chores as his wife recuperated following a cesarean section.

Paid parental leave is available to all full-time employees covered by the 2007-2010 PSC-CUNY contract who have at least one year of full-time service. (For details, see www.psc-cuny.org/Paren

The new benefit marks the first time that public-sector employees in the State of New York have received paid parental leave. Negotiations on a new collective bargaining agreement begin next year. At the October 24 party, participants filled out pledge cards promising to organize to make paid parental leave a permanent benefit.

PSC members who have enjoyed a new paid parental leave benefit gathered for a party at the Union Hall on October 24.

Tenure shift gets negative review

By PETER HOGNESS

The administration of City College is attempting to impose an additional layer of tenure review beyond the procedure laid out in the union contract. The CUNY PSC chapter has opposed the unilateral move as “a violation of both the contract and the law,” and has filed a grievance against it.

“This is a new and outrageous move from the administration. It is an attack on tenure. They are trying to change the rules without consulting the faculty,” said Mike Gregoire, professor of chemistry and PSC chapter chair at CCNY.

“That’s not optional – it’s required.”

In October the union issued a statement in response to the unilateral move. “The CCNY PSC chapter views the actions by the college’s management: 1) as an abrogation of the contract, which undermines faculty rights; 2) as a violation of management’s obli-

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CCNY move illegal, says PSC

The controversy comes at a time when the City College administration is in flux. The administration initiative on tenure began under the presidency of Gregory Williams, who left the position at the end of last spring, and the search for a new college president is currently underway.

“The current president is currently underway. He is not the candidate of the CCNY chapter, which is chaired by the provost, asked the college’s Faculty Committee on Personnel Matters to consider it. Williams resigned in September, and the search for a new college president is currently underway. Robert Paaswell, distinguished professor of civil engineering, took office on the provost’s letter as acting president in October. It has not been clear whether the change in the presidency will lead to the appointment of a new provost.

College spokesperson Ellis Simon declined to comment, stating that it was CCNY policy not to comment on issues where a grievance line expired.

We don’t just want to preserve it. We want to expand it,” said BCC associate professor of biology Nikki Mc Daniel, a member of the PSC Executive Council and mother of a 10-month-old son.

Eight weeks is a big step forward, but it still doesn’t cover the whole semester without getting people to use up their sick days and vacation time.”

BUILDING LEVERAGE

Queens College assistant professor of political science Keena Lipsitz worked on the original campaign to win the benefit. She is using the benefit this semester to be with her 5-month-old daughter. Lipsitz signed up for a number of tasks in the upcoming campaign including letter writing, attending chapter meetings, talking with colleagues, participating in campus activities to build leverage and attending negotiation sessions.

Paid parental leave is “a tremendous help for junior faculty up for tenure,” she said. “It’s really helped me and I want it to be there for other people.”

Parents savor extra kid time

Another happy PSC baby.

Union gears up to preserve & expand benefit.

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“This change that would affect faculty rights under the contract must be negotiated with the union,” said Mike Gregoire, professor of chemistry and PSC chapter chair at CCNY.

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In October the union issued a statement in response to the unilateral move. “The CCNY PSC chapter views the actions by the college’s management: 1) as an abrogation of the contract, which undermines faculty rights; 2) as a violation of management’s obligations to consult and negotiate on matters of policy and practice which affect the terms and conditions of employment, as covered by the PSC-CUNY contract.”

“The new procedure, which the administration announced in September, calls for tenure-track faculty members in their third year to undergo an evaluation by their dean, in addition to the annual evaluation by their department chair that is provided for under the contract.

“By failing to consult the union, the previous administration showed little respect for the faculty,” said Green. “It is our hope that the new administration will respect the faculty – and the contract.”

Jane Gallagher, vice chair of the union chapter, said that the process was unacceptable. “Our point is, you have to bargain with the union before you can do this,” she told Clarion.

“Whether it’s a good idea or a terrible idea, you have to talk with us first. And why wouldn’t you?”

There may be junior faculty members who need to get more feedback, Gallagher said – but so, management has not presented any clear reason why this can’t be dealt with through existing procedures. “If a dean thinks a chair can be more effective in certain ways, they can meet with them, discuss it, and ‘figure out how to work better,’” she told Clarion.

Nor has the administration made an effort to inform the faculty about the changes. “We want to expand it,” said BCC associate professor of biology Nikki Mc Daniel, a member of the PSC Executive Council and mother of a 10-month-old son.

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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 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, Queens, Borough of Manhattan, LaGuardia and Hostos Community Colleges.

Ira Shar
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 that pulls our degraded public life into the factory system. He thought we should finance a full education for every child, which would make education “an instrument of its transformation.”

“Vocational education,” he said, “would only fortify ‘the socially disfavored’ in their position, keep them in the black 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—immediately 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 to chair one of our committees. What do you think?’

And at that initial meeting we thought 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.

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 perspective is shaped in part by how I became a co-chair. I’m involved in a research project about college completion that crosses 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.

For both of these reasons, I was interested in Dewey’s vo- cational education and imaginative.” In the meantime, here is a sampling of what John Dewey’s Democracy and Education has to say regarding the structure of the college.

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freshmen is about 19. Overwhelm-
ingly, the young women we inter-
view do not have children, don’t
want to work full-time and are
full-time students. Alarmingly, 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 Vazzick
Adjunct lecturer in biology
BMCC

There is a danger that all the oxy-
gen, 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 exist-
ing 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
educational reformers all across this
country by saying the problem with
public education is not chron-
ic underfunding, it’s not racism in
this society, it’s poverty, it’s the
students’ education in a way that
is very vocationally oriented and
includes few liberal arts courses,
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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 in our 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 the management, faculty, staff and students to consider how CUNY can best fulfill its historic mission.

Susan Saladino
Instructor in nursing [retired]
CUNY

As a retiree of City College, I remember how the Goldstein Report in 1969 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 nurses with baccalaureate degrees.

Instead, many more nurses of color graduate with degrees from community colleges but have not been provided the associate degrees they need.

CUNY’s new community college initiative is to attract some of the over $1 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 ground-breaking 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, 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, 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 Solis
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.

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New Welfare Fund trustees appointed

By HEATHER APPEL

Four newly appointed trustees of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund began their service this fall. Representing a range of disciplines and union experience, three are veterans of the Welfare Fund Advisory Council, comprised of elected members from each campus. The new trustees – Robert Putz, Dan Pinello, Terry Parker and Paula Whitlock – say they will make prudent decisions to keep the Fund financially strong and safeguard the benefits of PSC members.

KEEN EYE

Robert Putz of Kingsborough Community College brings his experience both within the PSC and from his previous career in finance. “Before I came to teach here at Kingsborough in 2000, I worked on Wall Street for 15 years,” said Putz, now a faculty member in the Hunter College Center for Occupational and Environmental Health for many years, and until September, was co-chair of the PSC Health and Safety Committee. His past years of experience with the Welfare Fund, and time as a union delegate, have given Kotechuck a deep familiarity with the issues of the Fund and the responsibilities of trustees. “Since the financial crisis we faced early in my tenure as a trustee, we have improved the functioning of the Welfare Fund, cut costs, improved the level of benefits, and instituted a process to reexamine all contracts with outside contractors every several years,” Kotechuck told Clarion.

Other trustees have also brought important innovations to the Fund. Trustee Terrence Martell, Saxe Distinguished Professor of Finance at Baruch’s Zicklin School of Business, proposed that the Fund create a trustee Audit Committee and has taken it on as a major initiative. The trustees accepted his suggestion and changed the bylaws last year. The Audit Committee gives the Fund an extra layer of financial oversight, in addition to the long-standing annual audit by an independent accounting firm. Martell has experience with audit committees since he serves as the faculty representative to the CUNY Board of Trustees Audit Committee, and serves on the audit committee of the Intercontinental Exchange, a New York Stock Exchange-listed firm.

“The Audit Committee’s job is to ensure that the trustees are fully informed about all aspects of the audit process,” said Martell. “It sends a strong signal to the membership about the importance of financial controls and fiscally responsible behavior. It’s just good governance.”

In addition to serving as an intermediary between the independent accounting firm and the Fund’s management team, Martell said the Audit Committee plans to do a risk assessment to identify potential concerns. “This is members’ money, and there always needs to be a very thoughtful, professional approach to how the trustees treat that money,” Martell told Clarion.

The trustees exercise fiduciary responsibility over the Fund. Nine trustees are appointed to three-year terms by PSC President Barbara Bowen, who serves ex officio as chair of the Fund’s board. In addition to those mentioned above, other trustees appointed by Bowen are, Steve London (Fund Executive Officer and PSC First Vice President), Robert Cermele (Fund Treasurer and PSC Vice President for Senior Colleges), and Sherrian Grant Fordham (York College and HEO Chapter Executive Committee). CUNY management has two representatives on the board of trustees: Gloriana Waters, Vice Chancellor for Human Resources Management, serves ex officio, and Leslie Williams, University Director for Employee Benefits, serves as the Chancellor’s designee.

The Welfare Fund provides prescription drug coverage, dental, and other benefits for full-time CUNY faculty and professional staff, as well as basic health insurance for eligible adjuncts. (For more details on WP benefits, see www.psc.cuny wf.org.)

Health care rates increase

By LARRY MORGAN

Executive Boarder, PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund

Some participants in the New York City Health Benefits Plan, which covers employees, former employees and dependents, said they need to be made aware of changes in premium rates. PSC bargaining unit, saw two premium changes in 2009: the annual adjustment in September and the September adjustment was a one-time event – but these increased costs highlight the importance of making sure you have the best choice of coverage for your needs.

This year the annual period for making changes to basic health insurance coverage ends on November 30. If participants are considering changing plans, they must be sure to do so before then, or risk having to wait until the fall of 2010 to make the switch. All changes made before the November 30 deadline will become effective January 1, 2010.

WEBSITE

In order to make transfers, additions or drops in basic health coverage, full-time faculty and staff must visit the City’s OLR website, www.psccunywf.org, to submit a new health benefits application, available from campus benefits offices or the Office of Labor Relations (OLR) on campus. The Welfare Fund website, www.psc.cuny wf.org, includes a link to the OLR site, where there is a list of insurance plans, ride-along plans and other benefits. Members should submit completed applications to their campus benefits office before the deadline.

ONE-TIME HIKE

Here’s the background on the September one-time rate increase, which affected full-timers in plans other than HIP or GHI:

Those who are covered by the City health plan have the option of premium-free enrollment in HIP or GHI. The City’s agreement on health coverage with the unions in the Municipal Labor Committee, which includes the PSC, specifies the premium per-capita rate the City will pay HIP for this basic coverage, a rate that GHI also accepts. Those who choose another insurance carrier, with a different level of coverage, must pay the difference between the rate that the City pays HIP and their premium for the alternate carrier. That difference is generally calculated each July, after which the enrollees in plans other than HIP and GHI see a change in their premium rates.

The additional September increases were the result of a complex budgeting exercise to save $400 million in NYC’s costs for employee health coverage. In the two largest plans, GHI and HIP, coverage rules were implemented (see the Summer 2009 Clarion, page 9). The HIP changes effectively lowered the rate that the City pays HIP, which is the baseline against which all other premiums are measured. When the HIP rate went down, the extra cost of all of the “buy-up” plans automatically increased. This was reflected in an increase in payroll deductions for premium payments for those in the “buy-up” plan.

The net impact was that bi-weekly premiums for Aetna, Cigna, GHI-HMO, Empire BlueCross BlueShield and Vytra all increased by $1.53 for individual contracts and $3.74 for family coverage. Premiums for optional riders also increased.

Such plans may still be the right choice for many, depending on their coverage needs, but if changes need to be made, individuals must be sure to do so by November 30.

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BENEFITS & NEWS

GROWning movement

John Jay student Sergio Galvez leads a discussion during the second annual GROW (Grassroots Organizing Weekend) training held at the PSC in October. Facilitated by trainers from the United States Student Association, the two-part workshop series teaches students political organizing skills as well as the basics of the CUNY budget process. Seventeen students from seven CUNY colleges participated.
To join the union, sign a card

By JOHN TARLETON

Tony Davis recently started his second year as the director of Baruch's College Now program. He assumed he was a member of the PSC from the time he started his job, since he saw a union deduction from his paycheck every two weeks. So Davis was startled last month when he received a mailing urging him to enroll in a union that he thought he already belonged to.

"My first year was a blur," Davis told Clarion. "Because I was learning my job, I didn't really have time to study all the nuances of how the union works." AGENCY FEE

Until someone signs a union membership card and it is received by the union office, they are not a PSC member. The deduction from Davis's paycheck was an "agency fee," which covers the union's cost of representing non-members covered by the PSC-CUNY contract in bargaining for better wages and benefits for all, and representing any employee whose rights have been violated, etc.

There's no difference in the percentage of the paycheck deduction, whether for agency fee or union dues: It's a deduction of 1.05% for full-time employees, or 1% for part-time. But non-members don't have the right to shape union policy by voting on contract ratification or in elections for union officers.

To Marcia Newfield, PSC vice president for part-time personnel, that means joining the union is just common sense. "Why would you want to disaffiliate yourself?" she asks. "Wouldn't you rather add to your power?"

The next PSC chapter elections will be held in early April. To vote, members must have been union members for the four months prior to the election, and must take part in chapter elections next spring, members must join by December 1.

REMINDERS

Faculty and professional staff at CUNY do not always receive union materials, including an enrollment card, when they are hired. Even when they do, these materials are often overlooked or set aside. So the PSC sends out enrollment cards in regular reminder mailings to those who have not yet joined.

Professor of philosophy Carol Gould joined the Hunter faculty this fall and was surprised to discover that she was not a member when she recently went to look up her benefits on the website of New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the PSC's statewide affiliate. After speaking with the PSC Membership Department, Gould sent in her card, and became a union member on October 26.

"It was a combination of self-interest and the fact that I generally support unions," said Gould, the award-winning author of Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights. "They represent us collectively in a way that we can't necessarily represent ourselves individually."

Gould commented that the union needs to constantly publicize the importance of sending in one's membership card. "When the payments automatically come out of your paycheck, you assume that you are already a member," Gould said.

Naomi Weinman, an associate HEO from Queens College, had turned her signed card in to her human resources department before her appointment started on July 1. However, the union never received her card, so she sent in a second card after receiving the mailing.

"I will look forward to voting," Weinman said. "It's important to support the union. We need to have the union working for us." SIGNING UP

With the beginning of a new school year, the PSC is working hard to enroll payees as union members. Mailings have been sent to HEOs, adjuncts, continuing education teachers and graduate assistants, as well as CLTs and full-time faculty. As of October 2, part-time faculty had the lowest rate of enrollment at 55%, CLTs are enrolled at 65%, HEOs at 77% and full-time faculty at 82%.

Hostos was the top CUNY campus, with an overall faculty enrollment rate of 89%, including a 69% sign-up rate among part-time faculty.

The HEO chapter has been an especially active participant in the union's efforts to sign up fee-payers this semester. Besides sending out a mailing, HEO chapter leaders and PSC organizers have done walk-abouts on several campuses to meet fee payers where they work. These efforts in turn are part of a longer-term initiative to build union power within HEO ranks.

"It's the personal touch that makes a big difference. They see the union isn't something out there," said Don na Gill, an Assistant HEO at Hunter and a member of the PSC Executive Council. "It helps mobilize people when needed.

For Tony Davis the benefits of joining a union are clear. "We can never take anything for granted, especially in these times. We need that extra support at our back," Davis said. "It's an invaluable thing to have."

Meet the PSC's Membership Department

By JOHN TARLETON

The PSC is always in motion - protesting budget cuts, building political alliances, defending the rights of faculty and staff and more. Much of this activity is driven by the union's ability to keep track of its thousands of members - a task that is quietly overseen by a pair of women who have a mission of a logistical challenge going back more than two decades.

Diane Davis joined the PSC in 1977 as an executive assistant to former president Irwin Polinbouck and took over as coordinator of the Membership Department in 1983. Ana Torres joined the following year as Rosato's assistant. Their work is essential to the union's ability to communicate effectively with members, and to hold elections in which all eligible members are able to participate.

DATABASE

"Members are the base of the union, and we are always trying to reach out to faculty and staff who have not yet joined, answer any questions about the benefits of membership, and be sure we have their up-to-date contact information," said Rosato.

Maintaining the department's membership database ensures that union members receive ballots for contract ratification and union elections, as well as their copies of Clarion and special communications on urgent topics. Working together with the PSC's e-mail guru, Doug Ferrari, the Membership Department maintains the e-mail list for This Week at the PSC, the union's weekly online newsletter. (If you don't get This Week and would like to receive it, sign up at www.psc-cuny.org/ThisWeek)

VOTING

"The union's effectiveness depends on communication with members," said Carter. "Whether it's on the contract or a political issue, you can't get involved if you don't know what the union is doing."

One of the most important tasks for the Membership Department is making sure that the membership rolls are accurate. There is a challenge because there are changes every semester, particularly among part-timers. And since 2000, PSC membership has grown by 76%. "People want to know why membership hasn't increased since the payroll deductions seem to be," said Rosato. Under State labor law, there is an "opt-in" requirement, so employees have to sign a membership card. Otherwise they are agency fee payers under the law.

Whether a CUNY employee is calm or upset, Rosato says it is important to listen and hear people out. "It's their dues and fees that pay our salaries," she notes, "so we have a responsibility to hear what people have to say."

Having held her position under both the PSC's current and former leadership, Rosato knows the importance of being fair and impartial when hearing appeals from those who have not yet joined the union.

"As a member of the union's professional staff, I always take a neutral role," Rosato says. "Nobody has ever asked me to bend a rule. We go by what the card says. Nobody has ever asked me to bend a rule. We go by what the card says."

When membership cards are received at the PSC office they are checked in (with date and time) in the mailroom, and this becomes the official time at which someone has joined the union. Torres then inputs the data on the completed membership card into the individual's membership record.

Depending on whether someone works at a community college or senior college, the membership department forwards the information to the agency fee payer, or to the agency fee payer to have the agency fee code changed to union dues. New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the statewide teachers' federation of which PSC is a member, will subsequently send out a laminated membership card.

"There are a lot of details involved in membership," Rosato says. "I like talking to members and going the extra step to help them solve a problem."

RAPID GROWTH

Today there are more details to keep track of due to the union's steady membership growth. In October 1996, the PSC had just over 9,000 members, of whom only 524 were part-timers. Now, the union has 17,000 members, including more than 5,000 part-timers.

"It's interesting to see each chapter grow," says Torres. "At some campuses the chapter chairs work really hard to involve people, and you can see that."

To contact the PSC Membership Department, call 212-354-1352.
RF-CUNY needs to come clean

By NANCY ROMER

Of CUNY researcher likes it when overhead fees are taken off grants by the Research Foundation. Depending on the grant, whether it’s a service project or basic research grant, anywhere between 8% and 54% can be taken out of the bottom line. While we sometimes wonder if the percentages are really justified, we understand that there are real overhead expenses that must be met. No one questions the fact that costs money to provide heat and electricity for the space we use, or to handle a payroll for grant-based employees.

However, the CUNY Research Foundation (RF) is spending our hard-earned grant money on another type of “overhead” that is unnecessary and wasteful – and which could ultimately interfere with our ability to conduct research and do our work. A few million dollars of money taken from our grants has been spent on the services of Nixon Peabody, a union-busting law firm. This law firm is not working in the interests of our grants.

While the Research Foundation has its own in house office of Legal Affairs, Nixon Peabody provides a different kind of expertise: its experience in fighting unions. As the firm’s website explains, Nixon Peabody offers “union-avoidance training” and strategic advice on how to defeat union organizing tactics. “Our attorneys have successfully helped employers of all sizes resist unionization efforts,” the site declares.

HOW MUCH?

The CUNY Research Foundation has spent well over $2 million on Nixon Peabody’s anti-union services, at an annual cost that has run between $300,000 and $600,000. These numbers are based on the RF’s annual federal Form 990 – but that data does not include any spending since June 2008. The RF refuses to disclose how much it has paid Nixon Peabody since that time – even though it will eventually have to make these figures public, as required by federal law.

The RF’s secretive attitude about this spending is at odds with the values that should guide the work of a university. The Foundation owes it to CUNY faculty and staff to act in a more transparent manner – after all, this money was taken from grants that we secured. I am sure that many of the principal investigators would like the RF to disclose its current spending on Nixon Peabody’s services.

But this policy is counter-productive in a deeper way as well. It creates an atmosphere of conflict and mistrust where employees feel their efforts are not valued. Spending money from our grants on an anti-union law firm has only made contract talks slower and more contentious – and that doesn’t help get any research or grant work done.

So who does benefit from the RF taking on corporate labor relations? A few years ago there was a cartoon reproduced in a publication of the Institute for Southern Studies. It was crudely drawn, reproduced from a local union leaflet that showed a sharp-eyed lawyer pushing a list of anti-union demands across the negotiating table. His thought balloon says, “Ha ha! Now the union and company will fight, while I make $300 per hour!”

CUI BONO?

The cartoon is crude, but it makes a useful point. A strong anti-union stance by the RF may not be in the interest of CUNY researchers, or of the University as a whole. But it is clearly in the interest of Nixon Peabody’s billable hours.

The RF’s anti-union policy is part of a broader trend in US society. Rising corporate hostility towards unions and weak labor laws have produced a paradox: Opinion surveys show that most working Americans would like to belong to a union, but over the last generation unionization rates and working-class wages have both declined. That’s bad for our country – and right now the Research Foundation is part of the problem.

CUNY itself receives grants for job development and workforce training, with the goals of helping to create more good-paying jobs in NYC, and helping more New Yorkers to get them. But RF management is putting its thumb on the other side of the scale, trying to keep wages low while living costs rise.

In the current contract talks between the RF and its Central Office employees, it is clear who is being responsible and who is not. The median annual salary of RF Central Office employees is $46,000. Their last contract included a significant increase in employee contributions to health insurance premiums, from 11% to 17%, though wages barely kept up with inflation.

In the current long-running contract bargaining, RF management began by offering annual increases of 0% to 1.0%, and it has increased that offer slowly, in small increments only when put under pressure by employee organizing. (See page 8.)

Frustrated by this stubborn foot-dragging in talks that have now lasted more than a year, RF Central Office employees voted in mid-September to authorize their negotiating team to call a strike. But no strike date has yet been set, and there is still time to avoid such a confrontation.

A CHOICE

Top administrators at the CUNY Research Foundation now face a choice. They can continue to court conflict and risk a work stoppage that would disrupt our research, or they can make a smart, cost-effective decision to stop wasting our grant money on anti-union consultants, increase their contract offer, and quickly conclude a fair settlement.

It is clear which choice would make more money for Nixon Peabody. And it is clear which choice would be better for CUNY-based research and grant-funded projects.

Our grant money wasted on union busters.

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OPINION

RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Our grant money wasted on union busters.

RF Central Office staff would cost just $160,000 per year, 4% per year for three years would be $480,000.

What, then, is the value of Nixon Peabody’s services?

Hiring anti-union legal consultants is not only wasteful, it is counter-productive. CUNY researchers need our grants administered as effectively as possible, and if a problem arises we need to address it quickly and in a deeper way as well. It creates an atmosphere of conflict and mistrust where employees feel their efforts are not valued. Spending money from our grants on an anti-union law firm has only made contract talks slower and more contentious – and that doesn’t help get any research or grant work done.

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Frustrated by this stubborn foot-dragging in talks that have now lasted more than a year, RF Central Office employees voted in mid-September to authorize their negotiating team to call a strike. But no strike date has yet been set, and there is still time to avoid such a confrontation.

A CHOICE

Top administrators at the CUNY Research Foundation now face a choice. They can continue to court conflict and risk a work stoppage that would disrupt our research, or they can make a smart, cost-effective decision to stop wasting our grant money on anti-union consultants, increase their contract offer, and quickly conclude a fair settlement.

It is clear which choice would make more money for Nixon Peabody. And it is clear which choice would be better for CUNY-based research and grant-funded projects.

Nancy Romer is professor of psychology at Brooklyn College. She has served as a principal investigator of grants totaling over $5 million and was on the PSC Executive Council for nine years.
AN IMPORTANT REMINDER FOR FULL-TIME AND ADJUNCT FACULTY:
The deadline for completing the University Senate’s Faculty Experience Survey is November 25.
Survey data is being collected by a non-CUNY entity, Votenet. If you have not received a postcard or have lost it, please call the toll-free Votenet number for a replacement: 1-866-975-7133.

If you were a full-time or adjunct faculty member teaching by April 1, 2008, you will have received 3 postcards at your home with a user ID and password for completing the survey online. Survey data is being collected by a non-CUNY entity, Votenet. If you have not received a postcard or have lost it, please call the toll-free Votenet number for a replacement: 1-866-975-7133.

Facility survey due by Nov. 25

5. SAVE ON PRESCRIPTION DRUG PURCHASING. The Fiscal Policy Institute argues that New York State could take advantage of language inserted into last year’s budget to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies and save money on bulk purchases for the Department of Health. The savings could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

6. REFORM PERSONAL INCOME TAX. Last year New York took an important step by introducing a temporary, modest reform in the personal income tax system. But the state took the option of enacting the smallest of the proposed reforms, and made it effective for only three years. The only lasting solution to the State’s revenue problem is to fix the State’s revenue—and that means restoring a fair tax system.

DIFFERENT OUTCOME

The last time budget cuts seemed so inevitable was probably 1975, when New York City faced a severe budget crisis. Governor Paterson may have overstated the case in his speech to the legislature on the eve of a special session about budget cuts, but it is indisputable that the State faces a shortfall of $3 billion for the rest of this year and projected deficits of between $6 billion and $15 billion over the next two years.

Looking at these numbers, it’s easy to believe that there is no alternative to cutting state expenditures by millions of dollars. And that’s exactly what many in political power want us to believe. Cutting spending is the way to save the State, says Governor Paterson. Public employees give up their cushy benefits and pensions, say the editorial pages. The rhetoric of inevitability is everywhere.

TAX BREAKS

It’s true that New York faces a real crisis, but we’re not hearing the whole truth about its origin. When times were good, the State gave sweet tax breaks to the richest residents, cutting the top personal income tax rate in half over the last 30 years. New York’s income would be $18 billion higher this year, eliminating all need for budget cuts, if the State had merely maintained its 1983 tax structure. But instead, New York State allowed those most able to afford it to stop paying their share, and shifted its revenue structure to rely disproportionately on Wall Street. The result is that the State’s fiscal health is now inseparable from the health of the financial sector.

The budget crisis is intensified by the requirement that New York and other state governments must balance their budgets each year. Unlike the federal government, New York does not have the option of creating a deficit. So the State has essentially two options: cut spending, or increase revenues. Too little has been said in Albany about the possibility of saving money by eliminating waste, and too much has been said about the “necessity” of making deep cuts in the public sector. The possibility of long-term tax reform to restore a fairer system is not even under discussion. Instead, Albany is debating how to deliver a second cut this year to institutions like CUNY, which should receive additional funding because of their central role in revitalizing the state’s economy.

Those in power have a lot at stake in persuading us that there is no choice but to cut budgets, but there is an alternative. New York could start with the actions listed below, to protect the State’s short-term and long-term fiscal stability and avoid the need for self-sabotaging budget cuts. (My list owes much to the analyses of the Fiscal Policy Institute, whose rigorous and elegant work is available at www.fiscalpolicy.org.)

1. USE RAINY DAY FUNDS. Looking at the State’s bottom line, I think we can say it’s raining. New York State has two funds for unplanned deficits or economic downturns. The State should use the Tax Stabilization Fund, which stands at $1.039 billion, and the State Rainy Day Fund, which totals $480 million, before a single cut to CUNY is contemplated.

2. SECURE AN EXTENSION OF THE FUNDS TO STATES IN THE FEDERAL STIMULUS. Governor Paterson himself has pointed out that states’ economies recover from a recession more slowly than the federal economy. Recognizing that, the federal government included approximately $140 billion of “state fiscal relief” in the federal stimulus bill, and planned for that portion of the stimulus to expire in phases, ending in June 2011. These funds may not last long enough for New York and other states facing severe economic downturns. New York should lead the 47 other states with deficits, by pressing Washington for such an extension now.

3. ADVOCATE FOR “STIMULUS 2.” New York State should also advocate with the federal government for a second stimulus bill, one that would continue to provide direct help to states’ economies and support real job growth. Higher education should be a priority in a second bill; the first stimulus allowed many states, including New York, to allocate minimal federal funds for public colleges and universities. The State government would have legions of allies in such advocacy; unions and community groups would welcome the chance to add their support.

4. CLOSE LOOPHOLES AND END WASTE. New York has several budget loopholes and wasteful programs that should be closed. The failed Empire Zone Program costs the State approximately $600 million a year. In the fiscal year 2007-08, New York State spent $2.78 billion on private consultants, paying them an average of 54% more than public employees doing the same work. End just half the contracting out, and save $730 million over the next three years.

By BARBARA BOWEN PSC President

BUDGET CUTS ARE NOT INEVITABLE

ALBANY

In the fiscal year 2007-08, New York State spent $2.78 billion on private consultants, paying them an average of 54% more than public employees doing the same work. End just half the contracting out, and save $730 million over the next three years.

ALTERNATIVE CHOICES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED.