HEOs organize

An emphasis on campus-based activity encouraged many HEOs to become activists this year.

PAGES 5, 6–7

HANDS OFF!
MEMBERS FIGHT CONCESSIONS

PSC chapters hosted on-campus actions, such as the BMCC protest above, to oppose management’s concession demands and build support for the union’s agenda in contract talks. Members also organized for health insurance for graduate employees and paid parental leave. In recent sessions the PSC and CUNY each took demands off the table to focus the contract talks, but CUNY has yet to make a financial offer.

NYS HIGHER ED
Right diagnosis, wrong Rx

Gov. Spitzer’s Commission on Higher Education released its preliminary report on December 17. Its analysis was clear but its solutions fell short.

PAGES 5 & 12

PART-TIME CUNY
Students and adjuncts

CUNY’s reliance on underpaid, insecure part-timers has immediate and lasting consequences for students. Adjuncts, students and full-time faculty say everyone loses out.

PAGE 4

DREAM ACT
NYC students push for new law

CUNY students and PSC members have been organizing support for federal legislation that would offer a decent future to thousands of undocumented students.

PAGE 8

NEGOTIATIONS
Getting a good book contract

How do you get the best contract for publishing your book? The National Writers Union says it starts with being willing to stand up for yourself.

PAGE 9
Responses to AFT endorsement

Political power, we need to support a Democratic Party victory.

Peter Ranis
Graduate Center & York (emeritus)

Clinton & the Democrats – 2

Steve Leberstein and Manny Ness are right. Hillary Clinton’s history of “triangulation” — trying to win elections by meeting the Republicans halfway — is exactly the wrong direction for the Democratic Party.

The 2008 election is critically important. But to take this nation’s politics in a new direction, we also need to look beyond this year’s candidates and think about how progressive social movements can exert power in the electoral arena. If all our organizing goes into a candidate’s personal campaign apparatus, we’ll have little to show for it once the election is over.

What we need is an organization that builds its strength beyond any one election, one that operates both inside and outside of the Democratic Party. The Rainbow Coalition of the 1980s was starting to develop into that kind of vehicle, providing a growing base of support for progressive candidates by connecting them with grassroots social movements. The way the Rainbow linked the struggles for economic and racial justice also holds important lessons for today, particularly for those of us who work at CUNY.

Bill Fletcher and Danny Glover make a detailed argument for this approach in their article in The Nation, “Visualizing a Neo-Rainbow,” available online at aurorabau.org/nation.html.

This is a long-haul project, and only small steps may be possible in this election. But the time to start working on it is now.

Ron Hayduk
BMCC

Clinton & the Democrats – 3

The debate in Clarion over the AFT’s endorsement of Hillary Clinton is linked to our contract struggle and all the crucial issues labor faces. It’s not just the Democrats vs. the other parties. The slave-labor occupation in Iraq? Bush couldn’t do it without them. The slave-labor Taylor Law we’re up against? The Democrats back it, and Spitzer enforced it against the TWU. Now he and Clinton wind up echoing the frenzy against licenses for undocumented drivers.

No Child Left Behind, the Patriot Act, the new bill against “domestic radicalization”? Here too the Democrats seek to out-Bush Bush. And it was Bill Clinton who gutted habeas corpus and “welfare as we know it.”

If students didn’t learn in the face of so much data, they’d get an F. Yet labor leaders keep funneling votes and dollars to the Democratic wing of the Property Safety Act, as Vidal called it. This means more war, racism and union-busting; more Taylor Law, wage erosion and adjunct welfare. Clinton’s power continues to be channeled. Instead of playing by the rulers’ rules, we need class struggle and a fight for workers’ power. It’s way past time to break from the Democrats and build a workers’ party.

Sándor John
Hunter College

CUNY cheats adjuncts – and sets a bad example

One insidious effect of CUNY’s current adjunct labor policy, unmentioned in the article “Adjunct labor & CUNY as an institution” (Nov./Dec. Clarion), is their effect upon the academic integrity of CUNY’s students.

One key requisite for dishonest behavior is rationalization of the behavior by those in authority. CUNY students are well aware that adjunct faculty members are not considered full-fledged faculty by CUNY. CUNY students know that adjuncts are not provided ade-

Ness on the goals of societal justice and equity in the US and abroad, I think their criticism of the AFT endorsement of Hillary Clinton (Nov./Dec. Clarion) needed to say whom they would propose as an alternative. We would no doubt have similar reservations about all the other Democratic candidates with the exception of Dennis Kucinich. I frankly don’t see any deep ideological and economic alternative courses directed at the multiple needs of America’s unions and the whole of our working class espoused by Clinton’s other opponents.

I will vote for Kucinich in the New York primary, as a statement of political desire, but only because of New York’s special political culture. Were I in Florida or Ohio I would vote for the Democratic front-runner. As a wounded veteran of feel-good votes much of my adult life, I cannot justify an attack on the best placed candidate to move our political system incrementally toward the goals we share.

In the absence of a parliamentary system, in which Bush would long ago have lost a vote of confidence, or a proportional-representation electoral system, in which third party candidates could have access to building workers show strength

Thousands of SEIU Local 32BJ members were joined by allies on Wednesday, December 12, as they rallied after voting to strike management salaries on page 5 of TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5:

MONDAY, JANUARY 7: 12:30 pm / Part-time Personnel Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 16th floor. Contact Marcia Newfield at (212) 354-1252 or mnewfield@pscmail.org.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 1: 4:00 pm / Part-time Personnel Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 10th floor. Contact Jacob Judd at jjudd18@optonline.net.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 5: 5:30 – 7:30 pm / PSC Health & Safety Watchdogs hosts the first of three training workshops – this one on indoor air hygiene. The fee is $21. Contact Jacob Judd at jjudd18@optonline.net.

Wednesday, December 12, as they rallied after voting to strike

The fee is $21. Contact Jacob Judd at jjudd18@optonline.net.
CUNY steps on free speech

LaGuardia move sparks protest

By PETER HOGNESS

LaGuardia Community College President Gail Mellow has announced a ban on use of the college’s e-mail system for communicating about “union business.” No other topics of discussion were prohibited in her October 30 letter to PSC chapter Chair Lorraine Cohen.

“According to this policy, you can post a notice that there’s a kitchen up for adoption, or an apartment for rent in Bayside—not but that there’s a union meeting,” said Danny Lynch, professor of English and vice chair of the LaGuardia PSC chapter.

The announcement provoked a strong response from LaGuardia faculty and staff. “People are deeply disturbed,” said PSC Chapter Chair Lorraine Cohen. “They see this as arbitrary, discriminatory and contrary to the values of our institution.

CHALLENGE

To challenge the ban, the PSC has filed a grievance, a complaint with the Public Employment Relations Board (PERB), and a lawsuit in federal court. “CUNY’s ban on union speech is a violation of the contract, New York State’s Taylor Law and the First Amendment,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London, chair of the PSC Contract Enforcement Committee. “The PSC will pursue all legal options available to protect the rights of union members at LaGuardia Community College.”

The newly announced policy marks a sharp departure from LaGuardia’s past practice. The campus e-mail system had been regularly used for union communications for many years.

In her October 30 e-mail to Cohen, LaGuardia President Gail Mellow noted that Cohen had sent “notifications relating to PSC meetings” over campus e-mail. According to Vice Chancellor Frederick Schaffer, this was a violation of CUNY’s policy on computer use, because it allows CUNY’s computer systems to be used only for “activities relating to the performance by CUNY employees of their duties and responsibilities.”

Mellow’s letter asserted, without elaboration, that “union business” is not part of the performance of an employee’s duties and responsibilities, and she ordered an end to discussion of “union business” on LaGuardia e-mail.

The issue became a very public controversy the next day, when George Sussman, professor of history, posted Mellow’s letter without comment on a college-wide e-mail list.

TORRENT

“There was a torrent of e-mails in response to the letter from Clari- on. ‘People were outraged, including a number of senior faculty members who work closely with the administration, on the notion of any innovation and other projects,”’ He added that people were unimpressed with Mellow’s stated reason for the ban. “Performance of ‘our duties and responsibilities is intimately related to our terms and conditions of employment,” Sussman noted, “and that’s exactly what the union works on.”

SPIRITED DISCUSSION

A few days later, a posting from LaGuardia’s vice president of external and community affairs, Cindy Freidmutter, took note of the “spirited discussion” about the new policy and tried to clarify it. Freidmutter stated that Vice Chancellor Schaffer “is CUNY’s lead person in the contract negotiations,” and as such he has asked that LaGuardia not allow the use of the college’s e-mail for conducting union business” until the PSC agreed to bargain over the issue in contract talks.

“At the request of Vice Chancellor Schaffer,” Freidmutter wrote, Presi- dent Mellow had written to the campus PSC chapter to inform them of this new prohibition.

In a short reply, Gail Green-Anderson, a professor who has taught at LaGuardia for 21 years, wrote that she was “very disheartened by President Mellow’s decision to act in line with Vice Chancellor Schaffer’s directive. That directive sets limits on our ability to speak openly and honestly with each other.”

This view was shared by many, as the next wave of responses soon made clear. Sally Meister, chair of La- Guardia’s Faculty Council, wrote that Green-Anderson’s note “got to the heart of the matter that is in the heart of the college.” Why she asked, had Mellow instead “stood up for the principles of intellectual and communicative freedom?”

“Today’s clarification,” wrote J. Elizabeth Clark, professor of English, “means that CUNY management wants to decide when and where we can use e-mail. It’s…an arbitrary invocation of power.”

What sense did it make, she asked, to rule that “you can use college e-mail to invite me to your baby shower, but the union can’t invite me to a meeting about child care policies at the University?”

INTERVENTION

Three days later Vice Chancellor Schaffer, who is also CUNY’s Gener- al Counsel, intervened in the discussion. In a note posted to the college-wide list, Schaffer wrote that CUNY’s computer policy “permits inciden- tial personal use of the Univer- sity’s computer resources… Union business, however, does not constitute an incidental personal use.”

“What now?” inquired Sussman in his own post a couple of days later, noting that Schaffer had asserted this distinction but made no attempt to explain it. What it came down to, Sussman argued, was discrimination on the content of speech —in other words, “censorship.”

Schaffer’s real motive, Sussman suggested, was an attempted pow- er play in contract negotiations: “management was threatening union members right to free com- munication in order to win a bar- gaining chip.”

The PSC’s Steve London agreed. “These are union rights, rights which we and our members have had for a long time,” he told Claron. “Now CUNY management is trying to take away our right to open com- munication via e-mail and force us to bargain to get it back. That appears to be why they’ve picked this fight.”

“What CUNY has done here is out- rages,” London continued. “It’s disruptive to the college. Open com- munication is a right and should be protected.”

But that strong response from the PSC, management announced that this memo would not be enforced.

As Mellow faced controversy at La- Guardia developed, Lorraine Cohen and other local union members contin- ued to discuss union issues by cam- pus e-mail. In response, Schaffer e-mailed Cohen on December 4 to threaten that “if you continue to use CUNY’s e-mail system to conduct union business...your e-mail privi- leges will be suspended.”

When Cohen posted Schaffer’s note to the college-wide list, the re- sponse was immediate: about 25 people volunteered to re-post no- tices of union meetings if Cohen was kicked off the system online.

READY TO SPEAK OUT

“The most important thing has been this extraordinary outpouring of support,” said Cohen, “and the willingness to take action by the faculty and staff. It seems to have had the opposite of its intended effect, she said. “In- stead of people being intimidated, they’re increasingly ready to speak out.” Close to 200 faculty and staff have signed an online pe- tition against the ban.

“ar be unable to use college e-mail to discuss with the union’s ability to represent our members,” Cohen said. “It would be hard to imagine turning that off.”

Unless management reverses its position, she said, “people will be left with a sense that the CUNY ad- minister has taken a death blow to the rights of faculty and staff — the right to have the information we need to make our own decisions about important issues like the college and the University.”
Bad for adjuncts & students

Exploitation of part-timers hurts both

By DANA RAJENDRA and PETER HOGNESS

CUNY students often don’t know that their class is taught by an adjunct – until they need to talk with the instructor outside of class.

Adjuncts often spend time with students right after class, because they have to run across town to teach at another campus. And part-time faculty may not have an office hour – or, if they do, they may not have an office. If they have an office, they may have to share it with dozens of others.

Brian Foote, a Hunter College junior double major in political science and religious studies, appreciates that his adjunct professors make a big effort to meet with him. “I’ve had professors meet with me at the library,” he told Clarion. “I’m sympathetic, so I try to be as flexible as possible.”

Hughes, an adjunct lecturer at CUNY for many years, often goes over assignments with her students in the hallways at BMCC, because she shares office space with 50 other part-time faculty.

“You may set office hours, but your office is crowded with other adjuncts,” said Ruben Rangel, an adjunct lecturer at Bronx Community College. “That sends a general signal to students that their education is not a top priority. What’s more, ” Rangel said. “The CUNY management rebuffed a PSC demand that every adjunct be guaranteed a desk and a chair.

OFFICE HOUR

In the 2000-2002 contract, the PSC broke new ground by getting a paid office hour for part-time faculty who teach at least six hours a week on a single CUNY campus. But while this now benefits 4,000 and their students, the majority of adjuncts must still decide whether to volunteer their time.

Those who qualify for the paid office hour often find that it is not enough. “Our students are very underprivileged,” Hughes said. “I teach remedial English and freshman composition at Bronx and Manhattan Community Colleges. “They need a lot of individual guidance. It’s key to their success.”

With her freshman composition class at BMCC this semester numbering 30 students, Hughes told Clarion, a single paid office hour a week is simply insufficient to reach all of them.

“We’re prevented from serving students as fully as we could,” said Michael Fisher, an adjunct lecturer in political science. “We’re often put in a position of choosing one kind of professors that we can be, that we’d like to be.”

Still, the problem of the student is often hidden from undergraduates. Because most adjuncts go the extra mile to meet their students’ needs, students don’t know about the problem of the adjunct labor system, or how US universities got to be this way.

“The crisis in academic staffing has been almost hidden from the public because contingent faculty have done well in the classroom despite the exploitative and unprofessional conditions under which they work,” said Larry Gold, director of higher education for the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). “Looking past the individual classroom to the aggregate, however, it cannot be good for students when most of their instructors are so unsupported, he told Clarion.

Members of the Adjunct Project, an initiative of CUNY’s Doctoral Student Council, decided that CUNY undergraduates deserved some education on a subject that’s had such an important effect on the colleges they attend. So as part of Campus Equity Week this October, they developed a curriculum that helps adjuncts in different fields find ways to relate their work to their syllabi.

“I talked to my students about underemployment, and the difference between having a job and having a job you can actually live on, and how this fits into our discussion of welfare,” said Jesse Goldstein, an adjunct lecturer in sociology. “They were blown away – 70% of the kids in my class make more than me, and they’re struggling to get by.”

HOURLY RATE

Adjuncts are paid an hourly rate, based on the number of hours they spend in class. For those without a paid office hour, it works out to about $2.70 or $2.80 per semester for a three-credit course. Given the number of hours required to prepare for class and evaluate student work, said Jesse Goldstein, CUNY adjuncts find that their actual pay per hour is very low. “I’m doing something totally non-economic,” he told Clarion. “It becomes this antithetic thing.”

Five CUNY colleges – including Baruch, where Jesse Goldstein works – actually pay adjuncts less during exam periods, on the grounds that it takes less time to administer an exam than to teach a class. But both part-time and full-time faculty say that exam period is the busiest time of the semester. Union activists are outraged that these five colleges refuse to recognize or compensate the time that adjuncts spend grading exams and term papers, or meeting with students to advise them and discuss grades, during the end-of-semester crunch. (See photos above.)

Dan Skinner, who has taught part-time at Hunter for five years, explained similar lessons to his classes in a lecture during Campus Equity Week. “I’m volunteering when they get papers back with tons of feedback,” he said. After he explained this to students, they “start saying that they deserve better,” he said. “It illuminated to them why adjuncts often aren’t available,” he said.

Even when students do connect with an adjunct faculty member, it’s hard to develop a relationship because of uncertainty about where, when or even if the adjunct will teach another course at the same college.

“A student in my ancient philosophy class at Kingsborough told me that a friend of hers from La-Guardia, where I used to teach, had recommended my name,” Bruno Galli, an adjunct assistant professor, told Clarion. “But she was only in my class by chance because students don’t know in advance what classes adjuncts teach.”

Drew Hubner’s students in English 610 petitioned the Hostos Eng-lish Department to make sure that Hubner taught the next semester’s course, English 611, and at the same hour. They gathered more than 300 signatures. Hubner, who has taught at six CUNY campuses and 20 NYC-area colleges since 1988, said it was the first time his students had petitioned his department on his behalf, though they often ask about his schedule for the coming semester. “I have to say, he told Clarion. “It’s ridiculous. Students deserve to know who is teaching a class.”

COMMITMENT

It can be hard for adjuncts to commit to a given CUNY campus. Given the low wages paid to part-time faculty, it’s hard to turn down a higher-paying course at NYU or the New School.

Foote, the Hunter student, was most frustrated that his adjunct professor so often take their CUNY teaching experience elsewhere. “I wish I were working with people who’ll be more invested in the culture of the University,” he said.

The lack of continuity can cause problems for a student’s future. “Stu-dents often come back a semester or two later, wanting a recommenda-tion for a scholarship or a college ap-plication,” Hughes said. “But if you’re not there any more, you can’t give it to them. That’s not satisfacto-ry for either students or for us.”

This is one part of a larger problem: lack of job security or decent wages make it difficult for adjuncts to act as mentors to undergraduates. “Past student who’s considering grad-uate school just sent out a long e-mail to all her previous professors,” said Hostin Eisenstein, a full-time profes-sor in the sociology department at Queens. “She was asking what grad schools she should look at, what jour-nals she should be reading, and so on,” Eisenstein told Clarion that it will take her a couple of hours to write a thorough reply, she sees this kind of mentoring as a basic and im-portant part of her job. But part-timers are not paid for this kind of work, she said.

More broadly, problems in conti-nuity are an obstacle to building a general community, department chairs said.

“I think our adjuncts are good teachers,” said Baruch sociology de-partment Chair Glenn Petersen, “but it’s one thing to know how to teach. It’s another to know the stu-dent body of a campus – what works there and what doesn’t.”

Baruch, like many other CUNY departments, does not introduce a full-time faculty member to the student body of a campus – what works there and what doesn’t. But CUNY adjuncts are exceptional: a high proportion have PhDs and many are active scholars, despite the fact that CUNY provided them with absolutely zero support until the union negotiated a professional de-volution in 1996. Still, she said, “no one is well served – least of all our students – when half of CUNY’s fac-ul-ty work in underpaid, insecure, un-sustaining, contingent posi-tions with a single CUNY campus. Better pay is also essential,” said Bowen, “so that adjuncts are not asked to take a vow of poverty in or-der to give students what they need.”

Nationally, the AFT is also work-ing on both tracks. The AFT’s Fac-tory of Excellent Campaign (FACE) campaign, which grew out of a pro-posal by the PSC, is pushing states on both tracks. The AFT’s Facul-ty on Higher Education (see page 120) and CUNY needs better conditions for adjuncts, starting with basic job security provisions that would foster longer-term relationships with a single CUNY campus.

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“Adjuncts and students both would benefit from changes in the academic labor system,” said PSC Vice President for Part-time Person-nel, and College Excellence (FACE) campaign, which grew out of a proposal by the PSC, is pushing states across the country to create more tenure-track and full-time positions and also provide part-time faculty with more stability and better pay.

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A focus on underfunding

By PETER HOOGNESS

In its initial report, the New York State Commission on Higher Education said that the CUNY and SUNY systems had both suffered from chronic underfunding. But its proposals call for only a partial restoration of the cuts in CUNY’s public support over the last generation.

The report, released Dec. 17, calls for hiring at least 2,000 more full-time faculty for CUNY and SUNY combined, addressing a backlog of deferred maintenance on the campuses of both systems and a $3 billion reserve fund for both public and private universities. To pay for its proposals, the commission urged some increase in State funding and several forms of increased tuition.

“The PSC applauds Governor Spitzer for taking the position that New York State could – and should – have a premier system of public higher education,” said the union’s president, Barbara Bowen. The commission’s report, she said, “takes a first, powerful step toward making that vision a reality by identifying the underlying structural problem for public higher education in New York: CUNY and SUNY are underfunded and have been for a long time.”

But while the union credited the commission with the right diagnosis, it argued that the panel had come up with the wrong prescription. “The report’s recommendations fall short of both its vision and its analysis,” said Bowen.

For example, PSC leaders said, the report looks to students to pay for much of the new investment in the system through increased tuition. “What New York needs, rather, is public investment in public higher education,” said Bowen. “Shifting the burden onto students will inevitably restrict access to higher education for precisely those students who need it most.”

She said this is particularly true for CUNY students, many the first in their families to attend college and most of whom are people of color.

“We commend the commission for focusing on the loss of full-time faculty in New York’s public universities,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London, but its recommendation for only 2,000 new full-time lines is too low. CUNY administration’s State budget request for next year asks for funding to create 2,500 new full-time lines for CUNY alone, and London pointed out that CUNY has 5,000 fewer full-time faculty today than it did in 1970, despite record enrollments. “At the rate the commission is suggesting that CUNY add new faculty, it would take much longer than a quarter of a century to regain our full faculty strength,” he said.

The PSC also urged a focus on the historic decline in the purchasing power of CUNY salaries. Bowen said professors at Rutgers now make 24% more than their peers at CUNY, and those at the University of Connecticut earn 23% more. “To recruit – and retain – new faculty,” said Bowen, “New York must invest in making competitive compensation a priority.”

Governor Spitzer, who appointed the commission last spring, welcomed the report and vowed that his administration would “make New York’s higher education second to none.” In a press conference, Spitzer praised the report but stopped short of endorsing any specific proposals. “I expect these recommendations to become part of a continuing dialog aimed at helping our colleges, universities and students succeed,” the governor said.

The commission adopted the “compact” approach advocated by CUNY Chancellor Matthew Goldstein, a panel member. Its NYS Compact for Higher Education “proposes a ‘cost-sharing relationship’ that would rely heavily on revenue from tuition, private fundraising and internal cost-saving measures, along with increased State support.”

The commission also urged an end to “over-regulation on tuition pricing,” letting each college set its own rates without legislative approval. But the chairs of the Assembly and State Senate Higher Education Committees both opposed the idea of also making students pay a portion of what public colleges could charge varying amounts. The chair of the Senate committee, Kenneth LaValle, supported the commission’s call for “modest, predictable tuition increases” on a regular basis, while Deborah Glick, the Queens College alumna who heads the Assembly committee, criticized this as a plan for “automatic tuition hikes.”

The panel is slated to issue a final report by June 1. The 85-page preliminary report contains a plethora of other proposals, on topics from remedial education to support for graduate study.

Thirty PSC members gave testimony at the commission’s two public hearings at CUNY before the release of the report, on December 5 at the Graduate Center and December 11 at Hunter College School of Social Work. Speakers included both part-time and full-time employees, faculty and staff from 15 campuses and all five boroughs. Written testimony, as well as the report, can be found on the commission’s website, www.hecommission.state.ny.us.

Pace of contract bargaining picks up

By CLARION STAFF

In contract bargaining in November and December, union and management negotiating teams worked to narrow the 77 demands from both sides. While they remained far apart on the central issues, some progress was made in several areas. In both the November 27 and December 14 sessions, CUNY representatives continued to say they were not prepared to put forward a financial offer. “PSC negotiators voiced the anger of faculty and staff at still receiving no financial offer,” said Barbara Bowen, the union’s president and chief negotiator. “It’s vital that we have an economic package that restores CUNY salaries to competitive levels.”

PRIORITIES

In an attempt to reduce the number of issues on the table, on November 27 both sides withdrew several previous demands. The PSC agreed to narrow the list of proposals by concentrating on priorities announced at the October 30 mass meeting for this phase of the union’s multi-year contract strategy. See pages 3 and 11 of the Nov./Dec. Clarion at www.psc-cuny.org/communications.htm, for details.

In the absence of a financial offer, the PSC was unwilling to drop as many demands as management. “Union negotiators indicated our seriousness about addressing five essential areas in this contract,” said Bowen, citing the following areas:

1) restoration of nationally competitive salaries;
2) stable health insurance on the New York City plan for eligible adjuncts;
3) health insurance for CUNY graduate employees comparable to that offered by SUNY;
4) paid family leave and tuition waivers at CUNY for children of faculty and staff;
5) job security for CUNY’s most experienced adjuncts.

The union modified several of its demands, including those on health and safety, bailed sick days and tuition waivers, and it withdrew some technical demands. The PSC’s most significant move was to withdraw its major demand on a reduction in teaching load, deferring action on this issue for a future round of bargaining. “This decision followed the PSC’s announced conciliation filings on a few ticket economic improvements in each round of bargaining and being serious about winning them,” Bowen told Clarion.

The PSC did, however, retain its demand to increase the amount of reassigned time for research available for mid-career and senior faculty. The union also retained demands on improving salaries, increasing the top salary step, providing equity for lower-paid titles, advancing reclassification for employees in the Higher Education Officer series (HEOs), providing paid family leave, adjunct job security and health insurance, and a number of other economic and non-economic items. Management withdrew its demands on assigning teaching duties to HEOs, increasing the number of courses an individual adjunct can teach, reducing the amount of reassigned time available for union work, changing some notification dates in the contract, changing the grievance procedure, and making it more difficult to file grievances over items in personnel contracts.

Management’s most significant move was the withdrawal of some of its demands to remove from the bargaining unit certain on-campus college management.

Focus

CUNY did not, however, withdraw any of its most sweeping demands to increase management control and restructure the University along corporate lines. It maintained its demands to take away salary steps from most full-time faculty and staff, to remove department chairs from the union and to slash HEO job security.

“While it was painful for the union to withdraw even a single demand,” Bowen wrote, “the December 27 session made a significant advance toward being able to reach a settlement. With a narrower range of demands on the table for both sides, talks can have more focus and clarity.”

Talks continued on December 14, but CUNY again made no financial offer. A range of other topics, including provisions on health and safety issues, were discussed.

The union presented CUNY negotiators with petitions bearing more than 700 signatures demanding health insurance for graduate employees and eligible part-time faculty (see page 6). PSC negotiators invited Carl Lindskog, an observer at the session and the chair of the Doctoral Students’ Council Adjunct Project, to speak about the importance of obtaining funds from the legislature for health insurance for CUNY graduate students as a part of this contract. SUNY already provides such coverage, but CUNY is one of a handful of US universities that provide no health insurance for doctoral students and grad students.

As Clarion went to press, another session was scheduled for December 21. “The union is demanding some significant changes,” management continued, “but the PSC representatives for a financial offer.”
**Push for parental leave**

A key issue in contract negotiations is paid parental leave—which CUNY currently does not provide.

“When I tell people it doesn’t exist at CUNY, they say, ‘Are you serious?’ How can they not provide that?” said Victoria Ying, assistant professor of biology at City Tech. “At other universities, or in the corporate world, they have it. I think it’s time to do something about it at CUNY.”

“At Queens College, we had a petition with more than 200 signatures and organized a meeting with the college president,” said Karen Strasser, an assistant professor of anthropology. “He was generally supportive, but took the position that he is not involved in contract negotiations. We said, ‘We’re asking you to demonstrate your support by taking it up with the chancellor, taking it up with the Council of Presidents, because this is an issue of concern not only to the faculty at large but also to department chairs. You should see this as an issue that’s important to you, not one that you’re outside of.’

**NOT AN OPTION**

With a doctor’s note, expectant or new mothers (but not fathers) can use sick leave to get some paid time off—but CUNY President Barbara Bowen pointed out in the broadcast report that this is not an option for new faculty or staff who haven’t earned much sick leave or staff who have used it up with an earlier illness or injury.

“It’s impossible for me to have more children under the current policy, as much as I don’t want my daughter to be an only child,” Amy Chazkel, assistant professor of history at Queens, told Channel 4. The report closed with footage from the union’s energetic mass meeting on October 30 and said that “thousands of present and potential parents...have turned into protestors” on the parental leave issue.

In on-camera discussion afterwards, co-anchor Darlene Rodriguez noted that the US is among just five countries worldwide that have no law requiring any form of paid maternity leave—and that the other four are Lesotho, Liberia, Swaziland, and Papua-New Guinea. “That’s outrageous,” commented Rodriguez.

— PH

**Sick of no health coverage at GC**

In the first week of December, PSC activists at the Graduate Center asked their colleagues to wear a band-aid or bandage every day to call attention to the issue of health insurance for graduate employees. CUNY provides no health insurance coverage for its Graduate Teaching Fellows, Technology Fellows, Writing Fellows, or others employed on graduate assistant lines.

“CUNY is really an anomaly,” said Jennifer Gaboury, an adjunct lecturer and PhD candidate in political science. “SUNY and other major state university systems around the country almost universally provide their graduate students with health insurance, but not CUNY.”

**BAND-AID BADGES**

Participants put band-aid badges on their sweaters, foreheads and other attention-getting locations. But Kate Griffiths had to improvise; she pinned a band-aid to her bra. “Earlier this morning I had a blood test,” explained Griffiths, a graduate assistant in the anthropology department. “I paid $179 out of pocket. I really hope the test comes back negative, because I cannot afford to get sick.”

“I don’t go to the doctor,” Christa Paterline, a graduate student in anthropology, told Clarion. “Hopefully nothing dire happens—it’s a source of anxiety.”

The band-aids were used to draw attention to a petition calling on CUNY to provide insurance coverage for its doctoral employees and for eligible part-time faculty. “We were able to collect more than 400 signatures on the first day alone,” said Carl Lindskoog, a PhD candidate in history. “Grad students were waiting in line to sign—a rare experience for those of us who have tried to enlist support for other causes at other times.” At Clarion press time, the list of signatures had reached 700 and was still growing. (To sign online, go to: http://gradvocate.org/petition/)

A large table in the Graduate Center lobby was covered with a handwritten sign that read, “Student and staff petition to have this issue included in our contract negotiations.”

“Graduate students are sick of going without health care!”

— PH

*BMCC faculty and students press their opposition to this idea.*

Students in class craned their necks to watch the “conga line” of PSC members march by. “It’s a great day to be full-time faculty.”

Everett Flannery, chair of the anthropology department, told protesters, “I’m still part of the faculty, that I’m their professor, that I’m not part of the administrative suite, where President Antonio Citterio has ultimate control over everything. It’s time for us to push their opposition to this idea.”

Pérez surprised some protesters by claiming one faculty member before he turned and walked away. “I’m behind you all the way!”

Marchers offered a sentence or two of supportive talk. When noticed, speech was not strictly observed. “I’m doing my one word, I’m doing my thing!” shouted a faculty member. “We invited everyone who’d checked in to come.”

For many who took part, it was their first union action at BMCC, which Hill said was “the first step for the new people in the college, carrying signs and handing out leaflets about the union’s contract fight. The highly visible protest drew widespread support from students, as well as faculty and staff.

“They deserve everything they can get,” said BMCC student Alton Pierce as the line of protesters came upon an es-calator and walked down the hall. “The State is being cheap. We need our good professors at CUNY—they don’t get paid as much as at private universities, and they should.”

**CUNY’S CONCESSIONS**

Held on December 12, the last day of classes, the demonstration grew to more than 50 people. With signs that read “Hands off salary steps!” and “Hands off department chairs!” the protest urged CUNY to take its demands for union concessions off the bargaining table. For example, management has called for eliminating the current system of annual salary steps, and using that money to fund discretionary raises that would be controlled by the college president.

“That’s a terrible idea,” said student José Rosario after reading a leaflet and talking with one of the protesters. “It’s
C holds silent protest
Students, members offer support

I’m still part of the faculty, that I’m their “I love what I do, and I like the fact that should be taken out now.” I came here in 1974, and I don’t think we press their opposition to this idea.

Campus organizing often urged CUNY to withdraw its demands for union concessions. Management is seeking to take department chairs out of the union, eliminate salary steps, and slash job security for Higher Education Officers. “Those demands are all aimed at increasing management’s control over our working lives,” Fabricant said.

PSC's key demands. Demands off the table and support rankings, or if the president ultimately gets the power to appoint them, it would undermine collegial decision-making - which is at the heart of what academia is all about.”

Each time the quiet “conga line” entered a new department, the protest drew curious stares – which turned into smiles, questions and cries of support as soon as people saw what it was all about. “I’m behind you all the way!” exclaimed one faculty member before he was pulled back into a meeting. Others dropped what they were doing and joined the protest on the spot. The line got longer and longer as it moved from floor to floor.

Students in class craned their necks to see what was going on, while those in the hallways took leaflets, asked questions and shouted support.

PEOPLE JOINED IN
While the procession remained a quiet one, silence was not strictly observed. Marchers offered a sentence or two of explanation, invited colleagues to join them, and answered students’ questions.

The last stop was at the college’s executive suite, where President Antonio Peralto surprised some protesters by warmly welcoming them into his office. Anne Friedman, a professor at BMCC and PSC’s vice president for community colleges, asked Peralto to urge top CUNY administrators to drop the demands on salary steps and department chairs.

The protest “sent a strong, collective message to our administration, to CUNY management and to our colleagues across CUNY,” Friedman told Clarion. “We absolutely must get management’s regressive demands off the table, and that means we have to be serious and united in this contract struggle.”

The idea for the protest came out of discussions within BMCC’s local contract campaign committee and chapter leadership. “We wanted to do something new, something with a presence inside the building,” said Rebecca Hill, assistant professor of social science. “We thought a lot about how to make sure it had the impact.”

Its success was based on careful organizing – weekly tabling, inviting department chairs to take part, and broad outreach by e-mail and telephone. “When we were tabling, we’d ask people to fill out a volunteer card and check off things that they’d be willing to do,” said Hill. “One of those things was ‘attend a demonstration,’ so we invited everyone who’d checked that box.”

For many who took part, it was their first union action at BMCC, which Hill called a good sign for the future. The same was true for student reaction, she told Clarion. “To see the students gaping at us openmouthed as we went by was really fun,” she said. “We stepped out of our typical role – and they supported us.”

Related stories

Petitions, buttons spread the word

Close to 1,000 people attended the PSC mass meeting in late October – and as it came to an end, PSC-Treasurer Mike Fabricant asked them to take the next step.

“It’s telling that, just one month after the expiration of our contract, you organized to fill this room,” Fabricant said. “Now we need to go back to our campuses and engage people in a union conversation. We need to reach out, so that the members understand far and wide that we are in a fight.”

Union members took up that challenge in November and December, finding creative ways to spread the word and get new people in motion.

A number of chapters have held labor-management meetings, calling on their college presidents to tell management that CUNY needs a new approach to the negotiations – that we need more democracy. “We see this proposal as a transitional step towards appointment of department chairs out of the union,” Friedman told Clarion, “We are interested in the idea of having a presence inside the building.”

The union chapter at John Jay organized a petition drive to voice its members’ opposition to taking department chairs out of the union. “We see this proposal as a transitional step towards appointment of department chairs and making them simply part of management,” said Andrew Karmen, professor of sociology. More immediately, Karmen said, “It would leave chairs in some kind of limbo if they don’t have the protections of the union. And if they feel more vulnerable, they’re not going to be as assertive in speaking out to advocate for our interests.”

“Our lives are so intimately tied to decisions made by our department chairs, on everything from travel money to teaching assignments,” observed PSC Chapter Chair Jim Cohen. “If their independence is undermined, or if the president ultimately gets the power to appoint them, it would undermine collegial decision-making – which is at the
CUNY & the DREAM Act

Students explain the need

This fall, thousands of undocumented CUNY students saw their collective dream deferred as Congress again failed to pass the Dream Act, which would expand access to higher education for undocumented immigrants who came to the US as children. But CUNY students and graduates who have been organizing support for the Dream Act say they are not discouraged. They note that the bill received majority support in the Senate, even though it failed to win the 60 votes needed to move it forward, and they vow to try again in this legislative session.

“We are going to continue,” said Marisol Ramos, a recent Hunter College graduate. “Even if the Dream Act does not pass this year, it will be passed eventually because it’s a sensible, bipartisan solution to a broken immigration system.”

EXPAND ACCESS

Ramos is a member of the New York State Youth Leadership Coalition (NYSYLC), affiliated with the New York Immigration Coalition, the main group organizing CUNY students in support of the bill. Almost all the core members of NYSYLC are CUNY students or alumni, Ramos told Clarion; they represent a total of 11 CUNY campuses.

The Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (Dream Act) would allow conditional legal status to undocumented youth who demonstrate residency in the US for at least the past five years, arrive in the US before age 16, attend school diploma or GED, and “proof of good moral standing.”

Children have little say in their parents’ decision to migrate to the US, whether or not their parents have legal papers. As they near adulthood and must plan for the future, they face a looming threat of deportation from what is often the only country they have ever really known.

ASPIRATIONS

Cristina Jimenez, a Queens College alumna and founding member of NYSYLC, said that the Dream Act is essential to the NYSYLC’s mission of encouraging immigrant youth “to graduate high school, pursue higher education and pursue their dreams in terms of career.” In New York City, Jimenez told Clarion, CUNY is “the home for undocumented immigrant students to pursue higher education and success,” which she said, means passage of the Dream Act should be a priority for the University. “It’s critical that CUNY makes sure that all our students on our campuses and [consider] how we can help them.”

At CUNY, 38% of students were born outside the US mainland and 48% speak a language other than English as their first language. Charles Barron, chair of the City Council Committee on Higher Education, reports that an estimated 6,500 of about 40,000 immigrant students enrolled at CUNY are undocumented.

INELEGIBLE

NYSYLC members stressed the importance of maintaining CUNY’s policy of charging in-state tuition rates for undocumented immigrant students who graduated high school or received a GED in New York State. In 2001, after the attacks of 9/11, CUNY imposed out-of-state tuition rates on students who were long-time New York residents but lacked immigration papers. The PSC and a coalition of community organizations reversed this change by winning passage of current State law.

In the same spirit of advocacy for students, a number of PSC members are working to support the Dream Act, which the union has endorsed. George Priestley, a political science professor at Queens College, told Clarion he remembers recommending scholarship programs to at least three or four bright, talented students in the past, “only to find out that these students were not eligible because they were not documented.” Priestley said that “it was very painful for them to tell me” that they could not pursue the opportunity.

As someone who has taught at Queens College for 38 years, Priestley said, he knows that these students could become “great professionals – doctors, as lawyers, as teachers, who would make contributions to this society that the Dream Act could help touch my life” if given the chance.

REFRAME DEBATE

At a City Council hearing last October, Priestley said, “It is time to re-frame the immigration debate to include US foreign and trade policies; labor migration in the global economy; and racial/ethnic relations in the Americas and beyond.”

At a hearing, PSC members and CUNY students say why they back the Dream Act.

Priestley was one of several CUNY faculty to testify at the hearing, at which PSC Secretary Arthurne DeSola spoke on the union’s behalf. DeSola spoke of the union’s support for maintaining in-state tuition rates for all New York youth – but noted that without the DREAM Act, undocumented immigrant students at CUNY face a heavy burden because they are ineligible for financial aid.

“As a financial aid counselor at LaGuardia Community College for many years,” DeSola said, she saw “many [students] worked full-time [while attending CUNY] or frequently took time off from school to earn enough money to pay the next semester’s tuition and fees.”

While the Dream Act stalled in the US Senate last October after advocates fell eight votes short of the 60 needed to cut off debate, it is likely to come up again in 2008. More information is available at the NYSYLC website, www.nysylic.org.
DOLLARS & SENSE

Negotiating your book contract

By KEN WACHSERBERG

The most important part of negotiating a book or journalism contract is convincing yourself that you have a right to negotiate in the first place. Publishers count on the long-time practice of most writers to sign away all rights, no questions asked, in exchange for getting published. Your approach should be just the opposite: Don’t ever sign a boilerplate contract.

Publishers’ contracts are written by publishers’ attorneys for the sole benefit of publishers. In addition, more than once I’ve heard a publisher tell me, “No one has ever asked for that before.” Don’t be intimidated by this response. Take it as a compliment. You have broken new ground for writers. We thank you. With a few exceptions, every publisher is willing to make concessions. Don’t write for those that aren’t. Your dignity should come first — not to mention your professional responsibility and the control over your work that come with negotiating.

In negotiating a book or journalism contract over the phone, follow these eight steps:

**STEP ONE:** "Self-hypnotize." Convince yourself that you’re worth more than their boilerplate contract or you’ll never convince the publisher. Two lines to say with conviction (practice speaking into a mirror before calling the publisher):

> "I am a professional writer." This is especially important for academics. You’re not just an academic who writes or a writer who is academic. You’ve an academic and a writer. They are two different, though related, careers. That’s why I believe you should also belong to the National Writers Union — it doesn’t conflict with belonging to your academic union, and it serves a different need.

**STEP TWO:** Know your contract. If you join the National Writers Union (NWU) and are a book author, you can obtain a copy of National Writers Union Guide to Book Contracts, our bible. As a journalist, you can obtain a copy of the NWU’s standard journalism contract. Go through every clause in your contract and find counterparts from the Guide or the standard journalism contract.

**STEP THREE:** Contact a book or journalism contract advisor. At the same time that you’re calling the National Writers Union office to request Guide to Book Contracts or a standard journalism contract, you can request a book or journalism contract advisor. (Send an e-mail request to advice@nwu.org.) Being able to tap into the NWU’s contract advising network is one of the most valuable benefits of National Writers Union membership.

**STEP FOUR:** Know your bottom line. In negotiating, you seldom get everything you want. The idea is to improve your contract as much as possible but not be so rigid that you lose a potentially workable contract. On the other hand, not every contract is workable. What are your bottom-line issues, the ones in whose defense you would walk away rather than compromise? Two to fight for in this information and electronic age: copyright and electronic rights. As a professional writer, you want the right to profitably resell your books and articles without penalty. What else matters to you? Only you know.

**STEP FIVE:** Prepare an opening script and good notes. If you’re comfortable on the phone and totally primed for negotiations, maybe an exact script isn’t necessary. But remember the value of a good first impression in setting the tone of your conversation. A script is most important in helping you overcome initial fear of negotiating. Write it down beforehand and practice repeating it until it sounds natural. Only then is it time to make your call to or accept a call from the publisher. Also, don’t wing it or rely on memory during the negotiations. We’re writers, not rememberers. Write down the points you want to make about every clause, including the first bids, the fallback bids and the bottom-line positions. Here’s a sample phone dialogue to get the discussion moving in your direction:

> Assuming you’ve already talked previously with the editor and you’re on a first-name basis (don’t ever sign a contract with someone named Sir or Ma’am), start off like this:

>> "Hey, Les, I’m calling about my contract. I have a few concerns before I can sign it." ("Concerns" is better than "questions.")

Your surprised editor replies, "What’s wrong with it?"

You say, “I want to publish with you because you’re a prestigious organization. But besides prestige and a small advance (if you are so fortunate), what do I get for my hard work?"

Or, "I’m pleased that you want to publish my book, and I know that you have deadlines so I would like to get this contract signed to you as soon as possible — but I’m a writer (not an academic who writes!). I write words to pay my bills. You’re starving me here."

Or else simply, “Would you like to go clause by clause?”

**STEP SIX:** Take notes during the negotiations. The act of note taking empowers you and it prepares you for the inevitable follow-up communications. Record dates of all phone correspondence, keep photocopies of all letters you send, print all e-mail correspondence, and write down the names of everyone you talk to, including secretaries.

**STEP SEVEN:** Take a day to think about your conversation before making any commitments. Don’t feel compelled or pressured to make a snap decision over the phone. Report back to your NWU contract adviser and ask questions. When you demand time to think, you are taking control. And, of course, the extra time allows you to psych yourself up and prepare a script if you need it.

**STEP EIGHT:** Be prepared to walk. Those who have no human dignity and are comfortable being stepped on can ignore this step.

But you’ve read this far, so you demand respect. You’ve already determined your bottom-line issues in step four. If the publisher can’t respect those terms, go elsewhere.

Best of success in your negotiation. And when you get finished, drop me an e-mail and tell me how you did. I know your contract will be improved. I’d like to know by how much so I can share your success story with others.

Ken Wachserberg is the founder and co-chair of the National Writers Union’s Academic Writers Caucus, as well as a book contract adviser specializing in academic publishing contracts. The NWU’s former 2nd vice president for external organizing, he teaches at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti. He may be reached at ken@azenphonypress.com.

This article originally appeared on the National Writers Union website (www.nwu.org) with permission. The NWU was formed in 1981 to represent freelance writers in all genres, including fiction, poetry, academic writing, technical writing, screen writing and journalism. Affiliated with the UAW since 1992, the NWU’s grievance officers have won members over $1.4 million in grievance awards.

It’s smart to ask for more.

Reimbursement for Medicare Part B

If you are a CUNY retiree who is 65 or older, you’re entitled to a full reimbursement of your Medicare Part B premium payments — more than $1,000 per year. This important benefit was won and defended by the combined action of NYU’s municipal unions, including the PSC.

Medicare Part B is the portion of Medicare that covers doctors’ visits, outpatient care and other services not covered by Medicare Part A, which covers hospitalization. In most cases, the premium is deducted automatically from your Social Security check.

Reimbursement is not automatic, but you only have to sign up for it once. You can do so if you are retired and will be 65 or older during calendar year 2008. You can also be reimbursed for premiums paid for your eligible spouse or registered domestic partner. Once you are signed up, you’ll receive your refund check each month.

**SIGN UP ONCE**

To sign up to receive your refund, send a copy of your Medicare card to: NYC Health Benefits Program, 40 Rector Street, 3rd floor, New York, NY 10006. (Be sure to send a copy, not the original.) If your spouse or domestic partner is eligible for coverage, send a copy of his or her Medicare card along with your name and Social Security number to the same address. For more information, contact the New York City- Greater Labor Relations at (212) 513-6740.

For more details, see page 9 of the Jan. 2005 Clarion, at www.pscuny.org/communications.htm. — DR & PH

Beatrice, the daughter of Annie Frisbie, a member of the Writers Guild of America, and John Frisbie, a gaffer, was born 10 days into the WGA strike. Writers are seeking to share TV & film revenue from the Internet. Info on NYC-area picket lines is at www.wgaeast.org. Join strikers as they chant, “We write, they wrong!”
I  n 1976, when CUNY and other public services in New York City were decimated by the “NYC Fiscal Crisis,” it felt like a force of nature. With hindsight, it's clear that the gutting of public services in NYC was one of the first salvos in a political war that has spread around the world. In many ways, New York in the mid-’70s was a test case.

Over the next three decades, conservative forces created a new economic and political reality of fewer public services, fewer labor and environmental rights, and enormous increases in corporate profits. While politicians like Reagan and Thatcher sold it to the public as a program of “smaller government,” at heart it was driven by something else. As David Harvey of the CUNY Graduate Center says, it was a wealth creation program for the rich.

In his book title, A Brief History of Neoliberalism, Harvey uses the term familiar around the world for this attack on the public sphere. Under the banner of “liberalizing” taxes, trade, and regulation, the neo-liberals argue that the unrestricted private market can provide the solution to almost any problem. In political discussions in Europe or Latin America, “neo-liberalism” is a term as common today as “religious right” is in the United States. Yet here in the US, which has done more to develop and promote neo-liberalism than any other country, the term is much less known.

BREAKING HAVOC

Neo-liberalism was invented in the North and then imposed on the global South. In the US and other developed countries, the aggressive campaign to roll back public services has hurt the public employees who provide these services as well as the public that uses them, while private-sector workers have seen their incomes fall in wake of deregulation and pro-corporate trade deals like NAFTA. In poor and developing countries, “liberalized” agreements on trade and investment have gone hand-in-hand with loans from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) – which demanded deep cuts in public spending.

In nations both rich and poor, cuts in public services thus became the norm. Public education, in particular, has taken it on the chin. In the US, the attack on NYC’s and CUNY’s budgets was followed by California’s Proposition 13, whose strict tax reductions led to wave after wave of K-12 school budget cuts. In the years that followed, funding for all levels of public education suffered across the country. Once a climate of scarcity was established, privatization schemes and efforts to bust teacher unions were advanced as “solutions” to the budget crunch.

Reduced funding for public universities has meant a growing gap in salaries between public and private institutions; full-time faculty replaced with underpaid and insecure adjuncts; threats to tenure; and ever-increasing tuition and admission requirements. Instead of campaigning for a restoration of public funds, top administrators have increasingly sought to model universities after corporations. They have argued that if academia imitates the practices of the business world, it will make public universities more efficient and allow them to “do more with less.”

“Neo-liberalism” may be an unfamiliar term. But as union members, and as faculty and staff at a public university serving the great people of New York City, we have been its targets. We need to be aware of this to engage in the battle before us. We need to know what we are up against and where we can find allies.

Neo-liberal policies have wreaked particular havoc in Latin America. The misery of the average Latin American increased dramatically as IMF-imposed “structural adjustments” shrunk public services and shredded what little safety net existed. New rules on trade and investment have destroyed small-scale agriculture, decreased living standards, and sparked an upsurge in international migration. Latin America was promised an expansion of industrial jobs – but from Argentina to Mexico, neo-liberal policies have sparked massive layoffs and failed to lift workers’ incomes.

INTERTWINED FATES

For the poor majority, the promised gains never appeared, and the people of Latin America are now challenging what has become known as the “Washington Consensus.” These challenges are taking many different forms, but have some common threads: they are pro-worker, pro-public services and pro-national independence.

Teachers in Oaxaca are not buying the neo-liberal agenda; they are defying it. They know that their profession and their communities cannot continue within it. They are determined to create new ways to teach, learn and live that are creative and egalitarian.

International support for the striking teachers in Oaxaca has been an important part of the political puzzle. Teacher unions from all over the world have protested on their behalf; we in the US have visited Mexican consulates in our cities and held rallies to demand freedom for imprisoned union activists. The AFT and APF have all adopted strong resolutions in support of Oaxaca’s teachers.

The PSC picketed the Mexican consulate in solidarity with striking Oaxaca teachers in June 2006. The AFT and NYSUT have also expressed support.

SOLIDARITY

It is easy to see the Oaxaqueños as different from us. We have so much more than they do and we are much less engaged. But we too have had our victories against the neo-liberal agenda.

Beginning with demonstra- tions at the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle in 1999, we in the United States have also begun to say, “Enough!” US unions recently helped defeat the privatization of Social Security, which was supposed to be a top priority for the Bush second term. Increasing anger over the effects of NAFTA on US industrial jobs has put politicians who support such trade and investment deals on the defensive.

The continued devastation created by government policy in New Orleans – the ultimate in “fend for yourself” neo-liberalism – has been a wake-up call for many Americans. The strong public reaction to federal failure post-Katrina did last damage to Bush’s popularity. But two years after Katrina, areas especially neighborhoods that were poor and black – still lies in ruins. New Orleans today is an illustration of the deep national legacy of racism and shows how far we have to go.

A strong government that serves the needs of its people and supports the dignity of us all. We certainly don’t have that now. We can have it in the future, but only if we begin to work for it now. And we need to see the similarities and the need for solidarity across our borders so that dignity can prevail.

The right wing has promoted a pro-corporate agenda on an international scale. The US government has carried out mutual aid across national borders if we want our society to truly serve the interests and needs of the poor and working people. “United we stand, divided we fall,” has a new meaning: like capital, we must cross national borders to forge active alliances for our shared future.
LESSONS FROM THE CAMPUSES

HEOs re-energize chapter

By JEAN WEISMAN
Chair, Higher Education Officer Chapter

T

he summer of 2006, Arthurine DeSola, a Higher Education Officer (HEO) and the newly elected secre-
tary-treasurer of the PSC, proposed organizing a "listening campaign," visiting all 18 CUNY campuses to listen to the concerns of HEO-series employees. The union's listening campaign, which continued that Fall, thus began with a focus on HEO concerns.

DeSela was joined by HEO members of the Executive Council and HEO chapter leaders, including myself as chair. We heard members describe continually working more than 35 hours per week, a lack of promotions, an increased workload, a lack of respect by the administration, and many other issues.

As we continued our union work thought about all that we had heard, and the following summer the union planned a major HEO organizing effort. The Contract Organizing Committee worked with PSC staff organizers and chapter leaders to organ-
ize meetings on all the campuses. In the process, we saw a renewal of grass-
roots energy. This has transformed the HEO chapter's style of organizing.

DECIDING TOGETHER

In the past, we had organized chapter meetings with speeches by PSC representa-
tives, defended HEOs with grievances, and encouraged HEOs to participate in union activities. However, it was always difficult to keep up with members' needs, since the HEO chapter represents 2,800 people at 18 different campuses. The work depended on a few people and we always felt like we weren’t doing enough. At the same time, we often felt overwhelmed by all we had to do.

In the summer of 2007, the union assigned four union organizers and a new coordinating officer to work with HEOs. PSC "Trea-
surer Mike Fabre's background in community and labor organizing was par-
ticularly useful as we planned our effort. We divided the campuses amongst four HEO PSC executive committee members and the chapter chair. Each of us was responsible for a specific geographic area. The organizers called key contacts, set up meetings, and collected signatures and e-mail addresses for the future. At each meet-
ing, the local campus activists played a critical role in bringing people together.

As we went to each campus, we didn’t approach these meetings with the attitude that we were coming to simply give people information or to tell them what to do. Our goal was to find out their concerns, discuss what they needed, and decide together what we could do about it.

We wanted to get to know people we weren’t already in contact with and learn who wanted to be an organizer. People who were happy to see us, and it turned out that many people at the meetings were willing to be organizers. We worked to spread out the responsibility, so that one person would write an e-mail, another would make some phone calls, and no one would feel overburdened.

Soon we began to see results. People began organizing their own meetings, trying to solve their own problems without necess-
arily calling chapter leaders first. Some-
one might call me to say, "We had a meeting and these are the four questions people came up with – what do you think about this one?" Members took responsi-
bility for informing us about the issues on their campuses and took responsibility for resolving them.

STRONGER NETWORKS

By the end of the summer, we had orga-

nizing committees on most of the campus-
es. Some organized monthly meetings, and most established e-mail lists. HEOs on some campuses publish their own newsletter.

Members' activity is more developed at some colleges than at others – but across CUNY, more HEOs are acting as organizers and building stronger union networks.

More and more, people realize that the union is not an insurance company or a law firm where you call up and expect someone else to solve your problems for you. We are the union, and the union is stronger than the sum of its parts. The PSC has been around for more than 35 years, and we can merge the experience of the of-

ficers and the staff with the needs of the members today.

VICTORIES

Around the same time as the summer organizing campaign, we published "The HEO Handbook," explaining union mem-
bers' basic rights – and we won two impor-
tant victories. Nine HEO-series employees at LaGuardia Community College, with the help of union staff and officers, went to court to sue for overtime and back pay. They won a settlement awarding each of them $2,500 in back pay and an agreement by the college to pay time-and-a-half for overtime beyond 40 hours per week. Next they won an arbitration award that af-

firmed the right to compensatory time for all HEO-series employees who work more than 35 hours per week.

Those victories helped us, because peo-

ple could see that when you take a stand, when you get involved, it’s worth it.

Social networks are also important in or-

organizing. We tried to work with social net-

works where they already existed, and help establish them where they did not. Many members of HEO associations. Several were formed after re-

trenchment was declared in 1992 and a dis-

proportionate number of HEOs were termi-

nated. These associations became voices for HEOs on their campuses. They organized educational activities, held meetings with their college president and took on professional development activi-
ties (such as Outward Bound), charity work and social events. We were able to hook up with these associations and vari-

ous social networks to work together to build the chapter.

BUILDING SUPPORT

But we also found many isolated HEOs, who enjoyed the opportunity to meet with other staff organizers and union representa-
tives. In some departments, like the bursar’s office, financial aid, admissions, or the registrar, HEOs experience a lot of cama-

daraderie because a group of people work to-

together – and work very hard together around registration. In other departments, however, HEOs operated – they may be the only one in their office, and their work may not often bring them in contact with other staff. These people especially appreciate union outreach. They have important issues, but it may be that nobody has ever spoken with them before about the union.

Once summer was over, we kept on organizing. In September and October, we organized luncheons with five to ten members at each campus, encouraging people to set up a system of representa-
tives from each department, building or floor. Over the summer, we had asked all HEOs to sign the petition in support of the PSC's contract demands. In the Fall, we used our expanded networks to encourage people to attend the mass meeting about the contract on October 30 at Cooper Union. We were ready to work with the large turnout of HEOs there.

In the meantime, CUNY management was able to get a hard-won job security, so we can treat us as disposable employees and wants to take away our salary steps and offer "merit" pay. (You can read about management’s demands on the PSC web-

site, at www.psc-cuny.org/Contract/update 07April12.htm.)

COLLECTIVE ACTION

In response, we are asking all PSC mem-
bers to wear the buttons “Hands Off the HEOs!”, a suggestion of a member who came to one of our luncheon meetings this Fall, we are asking all HEOs to write let-
ters to Chancellor Goldstein to express their opposition to the administration’s de-

mands and their support for a reasonable workload, promotions, and respect and dignity for HEOs.

Development of our work in a collective way has been liberating for many of us. We are no longer just a few people who are worrying about organizing all the campuses. The story of the HEO chapter done – we are tackling that work with the full resources of the union, leadership, staff and rank-and-file. It is now an essential and vital part of the entire work of the union.

HEDS at LaGuardia Community College talk about their concerns.
A PSC PROPOSAL

Building the 21st-Century CUNY

Below is the PSC’s proposal to the New York State Commission on Higher Education, which released its preliminary report on December 17 (see page 5). “Our proposal is for a bold and unapologetic reinvestment of public money in CUNY,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told the commission in testimony on December 2. “Decades of damage cannot be undone by business-as-usual marginal increases, and losses on the magnitude of those suffered by CUNY cannot be recouped by imposing higher costs on our students.”

To reverse the three decades of underfunding of the City University of New York and provide the resources necessary to make CUNY one of the nation’s great universities, substantial new investments are needed over the next five years:

- Add new full-time faculty lines sufficient to bring CUNY’s full-time faculty workforce to 11,000, which is the number of full-time faculty employed by CUNY before State and City disinvestment.

This Fall, CUNY enrolled 221,114 students – it’s the largest student body at any time in the last 35 years. Yet, the University now has only 6,541 full-time faculty, including librarians and counselors, or 4,512 less than in 1972. To put it another way, CUNY has approximately 1 full-time faculty member for every 35 students enrolled today, compared to 1 for every 21 students enrolled in 1972.

The PSC strongly supports CUNY’s hiring target of 2,200 new full-time faculty over the next four years so that 70% of the instructional workload can be covered by full-time faculty. This will not completely close the gap – especially if enrollments rise more than expected – but it will be a major step forward.

- Restore faculty compensation and benefits to national competitiveness, so that CUNY is able to recruit and retain top quality faculty who want to make their careers at CUNY. Salaries for full-time faculty and staff at CUNY have lost between 27% and 51% of their value since 1972. At a time when the cost of living in New York City is making it increasingly difficult for middle-class people to stay and raise a family here, CUNY is finding it harder to retain faculty at all levels. Though the University is still able to recruit young professors because of its reputation as an exciting place to work, the University is on the verge of becoming non-competitive nationally because of depressed salaries and substandard working conditions. Restoring the competitiveness of faculty compensation and benefits is critical if CUNY is to contribute to the broad research and development agenda as well as train large numbers of new public school teachers – to name but two specific goals envisioned in the governor’s charge to the commission. Restoration of salaries and conditions to competitive levels is also essential if CUNY is to replace the generation of senior faculty now nearing retirement.

- New service learning programs, new grantsmanship, and support for student research are integral to fixing the University’s recruitment and retention problems. CUNY students are the future of New York and New York’s future. Outside the College Discovery and SEEK programs, CUNY community colleges have only one licensed mental health counselor for every 2,236 students on average; senior colleges and graduate programs have just one for every 5,096. These levels of service fall far short of the nationally-recognized standards of one for every 1,000-1,500 students.

Find the ‘lost’ faculty

How many of your department’s candidates have turned down an offer and how many of your colleagues have left CUNY because of our uncompetitive salaries, onerous workloads, inadequate research support, or missing paid parental leave, among benefit or other concerns? Take a few minutes to fill out the form at www.psc-cuny.org/LostFaculty.htm and help the PSC document CUNY’s “lost” faculty and staff. By filling out the form, you’ll help the union show that improvements in salaries and working conditions are integral to fixing the University’s recruitment and retention problem. Help us alert students, allies, and political and civic leaders to the crisis CUNY faces as a result of its uncompetitive salaries!