On May 6, faculty, staff and students joined together for “CUNY at the Council,” a day of grassroots lobbying on the CUNY budget. Above, David Weprin, chair of the City Council’s Finance Committee, discusses City funding with PSC President Barbara Bowen (at right) and others (from left: PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola; PSC Solidarity Committee Co-Chair Jim Perlstein; and Weprin’s chief of staff, Christina Katsanos, who teaches in the evening as an adjunct at John Jay). This year’s City budget must be approved by July 1, and the PSC is opposing Mayor Bloomberg’s proposed $40 million cut to CUNY funding.
The pleasure of learning

Sarah Durand

Associate Professor of Biology at LaGuardia Community College

Dual BA in Marine Biology/MA in Ecology and Evolution, University of Pennsylvania '81.

PHD in Neuroscience and Behavior, Rutgers Center for Molecular and Behavioral Neuroscience '93.

A s the only child of parents who made their living in theater, Sarah Durand grew up around performers. And while she surprised her family by pursing a career in biology, Durand has been busy in recent years observ- ing a talented group of natural performers – two dozen zebra finches – and then studying their brain's neural networks. Her work allows her to compare patterns of brain cell activation markers across brain pathways that mediate motivation and reward functions for vocal learning.

Durand, who gained tenure at LaGuardia last year, is continuing a study of zebra finches that began as a CUNY Collaborative Grant to Durand and Cheryl Harding (Hunter) in 2004. The research involves the role of the brain's naturally occurring opiate system in motivating vocal learning and performance.

“Why learn a skill that provides no immediate external physical reward?” she asks. “The hypoth- enol (Hunter). The study investigates enium is that it's pleasurable.”

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the role of the brain's naturally

(THE BLACKBOARD)

You have to captivate your audience,” says biologist Sarah Durand.

life scientists.

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Durand says the findings of neu- robiologists offer interesting lessons for educators and policymakers. A punitive, test-centered model of education “runs counter to our under- standing of how our brain works,” Durand says. “It's in the academic community that the more fun learning is, the more effectively we learn. We need to use the emotional brain to be engaged with the cogni- tive brain.”

FUN FACTS

Child actor: Durand made her debut on the professional stage at age 11 at a summer stock theater in Corning, NY. In the production of Wait Until Dark, she played a girl who assists a blind woman who has been targeted for murder. She automatically became a member of Actors Equity, the union for professional theater performers.

Extra-curricular activities: Before purs- ing her PhD, Durand spent four years working as a high school biology teacher in New York City. In her spare time, she pursued her interests in Afro-Brazilian samba dancing, percussion and comic opera, and acting for the Riverside Shakespeare Company.

Her favorite role: Hermia, the star- crossed lover in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream. She said the role shows “time cures despair.”

All the world's a stage: “Both teach- ing and theater are performing,” Durand says. “You have to captivate your audience. You have to be aware if your audience is with you. And timing is important. You build up a sense of expectation.”


The making of a scientist: Durand, who grew up on the Upper West Side, would travel with her family for summer seasons at theaters located on the coast.

“My father would take me for walks in the intertidal zone,” she recalls, “and I would collect pets in a red bucket full of sea water and study them at night. It was so amazing to watch the clams open up and watch the sea anemone extend its tentacles. It was magical. I fell in love with the sea. I wanted to understand how these little ani- mals worked and wanted to know what else was out there beyond the intertidal zone that I couldn’t see.”

Flipper! Durand's interest in animal and brain behavior began when she read a book on dolphin intel- ligence. “It excited me to know that intelligent animals also lived in the ocean who communicate vocally with each other...What did they communicate? What were they learning from each other?”

Adjunct struggle: After studying the vocal pathways in the forebrain of parrots as a research associate in College Park, Maryland, Durand moved back to New York in 2000. She taught as an adjunct at Hunter and Queens Colleges while rais- ing her daughter and attempting to continue her research in the neuroscience of avian communica- tion at Hunter. “Having time to do research when you are running around to more than one campus is difficult,” she says.

Back to the water: Durand and her colleagues are working to launch an environmental science major at LaGuardia. This summer Durand and a small group of interested students and colleagues will par- ticipate in a pilot project with the environmental group Riverkeeper and Queens College to monitor water quality of local feeder wa- terways to the Hudson estuary to determine daily fluctuations in conditions. The focus will be on Newtown Creek, directly behind LaGuardia. The creek, which di- vides Brooklyn and Queens, is the site of the largest oil spill in US history.

Why should unionists care? There are one billion food workers in agriculture, processing, retail and restaurants; they are often among the workers whose rights are under the sharpest attack, e.g., at Smithfield, Stella D'oro or the Co- alition of Immokalee Workers.

The global movement for “food democracy” or “food sovereignty” – people's control over their own food production and distribution – is enormous. It includes the Food Chain Workers Alliance, which brings to- gether workers across the multiple parts of the industry. Affordable food – yes! But not at the expense of the people who put it on our plates.

Food is a powerful issue because it allows people to organize locally, building community through a wide range of activities in which people feel connected and com- fortable. Organizing for control of natural resources – food, water and energy – allows people to organize to control their lives against corpo- rate and imperial powers.

Nancy Romer

Brooklyn College

Write to Clarion

Letters must be less than 200 words and are subject to editing.

Life/Work

The writing on the Blackboard

Thank you for the extensive and detailed report in Clarion on the meltdown of the Blackboard computer system this semester. I was especially grateful because otherwise there was so little information about this calamity from the CUNY website itself. I repeat- edly logged on and was told that Blackboard was down and was thanked for my patience, an experience akin to being told, “Your call is very important to us.”

The timing could not have been worse coming as it did during the midterms and the final week of the semester, and it was even more frustrating for teachers and students who had invested so much effort in participating in this website. The lack of an adequate explanation only added to the ag- gression. It was a reminder to the union to take responsibility for covering this story in more detail.

Richard McCoy

Queen’s College & Graduate Center

Library limits?

The e-mail newsletter “This Week in the PSC” for May 11 proudly reports that my PSC’s “leadership strongly supports the right of CUNY faculty to elect their department chairs...The decision on who is best qualified to lead the department – whether for one term or for many – should remain in the hands of the faculty.”

This policy of my PSC has one major flaw: none of the library de- partments in any CUNY college has this privilege. Library chairs are appointed by the respective CUNY college president and are there for as long as the administration wants them there or until that chair retires or dies. This can be for decades. In other words, they are entrenched whether they are good for their li- brary, good for their librarians or good for their students.

These long-term yes-people have good incentive not to change their status quo no matter how innova- tive and motivated their junior or senior colleagues. This would likely very much have to term limits on their departmental chairs even if the set term is longer than three years, say five years.

Why anonymity of this letter? Junior faculty are at the mercy and whim of their autocractic chair.

[Name & college withheld]

Editor’s note: In past collective bar- gainning, the union has demanded addition of contract language to establish that “the Chairpersons of Library, Counseling and Co-op De- partments shall be elected by mem- bers of the respective departments.”

The PSC believes that this is the re- form that is needed – to make the selection of chairs in these departments democratic, not a matter of administrative fiat.

The union has also strongly de- fended the principle of election of department chairs in the other de- partments where it already exists. (See page 12 for more on the term limit issue.)

Food for thought

PSCers and CUNY students were part of the 3,300 people attending the May 2 Brooklyn Food Conference (www.brooklynfood- conference.org). Healthy, sustain- able food for all with social justice in agriculture, processing, retail and restaurants is a matter of democracy, not a matter of administrative fiat.

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Clarion | June 2009

NEWS & LETTERS
Big win for New Caucus in PSC leadership elections

Bowen re-elected as president with 62% support

By PETER HODGNESS

When the ballots were counted in the PSC’s leadership elections, the New Caucus was returned to office with the strongest vote it has ever received in a contested union-wide race.

President Barbara Bowen was re-elected by a 24-point margin, defeating CUNY Alliance candidate Fred Brodzinski by 62% to 38%. The New Caucus swept contests for all 27 positions on the union’s Executive Council by about the same amount. Votes were tallied April 30 by the American Arbitration Association.

“This is a victory for union leadership that is imaginative, aggressive, meticulous and unafraid,” said Bowen. “There was a real policy difference between the candidates, and members saw that. Faculty and staff in every category voted overwhelmingly to support a leadership that combines bread-and-butter gains for members with a necessary political vision. I am humbled by their confidence and will redouble my efforts to live up to it.”

MEMBER CONFIDENCE

The New Caucus more than doubled its margin of victory from the previous union-wide election in 2006, when Bowen won 55% of the vote and bested the CUNY Alliance candidate by 10 points.

Brodzinski conceded that his $2 million figure included a range of expenses. “Some of those are obviously relevant – if you’re lobbying in Albany on the budget, for example,” Brodzinski said. “But I don’t see the relevance for example,” Brodzinski said. “We don’t work alone, that’s not our support, they will be there for you,” DeLutro said. “Any good unionist knows we have to support each other. Defending the rights of all workers makes us stronger, and it’s basic to what unions do.”

The New Caucus re-elected as vice president was re-elected on the New Caucus slate. “Winning a grievance and the American Federation of Teachers, that support these affiliates’ political activity such as lobbying in Albany or Washington. The overwhelming majority of the remainder was spent on the PSC’s own efforts to oppose budget cuts and expand State and City funding for CUNY.

Brodzinski offered a somewhat different explanation for the union-wide fall out in CUNY Alliance support. “I think we stimulated more people to vote,” he said, “which is a good thing.” He congratulated the New Caucus on its win. “Once the election is over those who are there are the keepers of everyone’s interest, and until the next election they need to be supported. People have made a choice, and now we need to work together to improve the things we talked about.”

PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant invited all members to join the union’s efforts. “We will continue to build the power to leverage the kinds of investment necessary to make the University the world-renowned institution it is today.” Fabricant told Clarion. “Winning increased investments in a period of fiscal meltdown, however, will require all of our energy. We will need every member’s involvement if we are to achieve what the citizens of NYC so richly deserve, access to a quality public higher education.”
LABOR IN BRIEF

**Wear that union label**

Major League Soccer’s new franchise in Philadelphia announced May 11 plans to sign a labor contract with the players union. The club, which will be named the Union, chosen by fans who voted online, the name references both Philadelphia’s part in the nation’s founding and its strong labor movement heritage.

**Tough questions for NYC hotels**

Nearly two dozen New York City hotels filed requests this spring to abandon 3.5% raises due to workers in July, according to Crain’s New York Business. But seven hotels backed off after the union insisted on stringent financial disclosure — plus plans to cut executive compensation — before considering any labor concessions.

“I don’t believe any hotels are going to be able to come to us with real proof that they have the kind of long-term economic hardship that would make it necessary for working people to give back raises and benefits,” said Peter Wurzel, president of New York Hotel and Motel Trades Council. “I’m going to fight them like hell.”

**Employee Free Choice update**

The lead sponsor of the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) has vowed to bring the measure to the floor of the Senate in a straight up-or-down vote if his wavering colleagues refuse to reach a compromise agreement that honors the measure’s core principles. Mark Greenburg of the labor news service, Press Associates, reported that Sen. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) has been working to craft a compromise that could include mail-in ballots to sign whether workers want to have the union represent them — rather than polls at workplaces — and union authorization cards that include a choice of “no union” on them. The measure would also include stiffer penalties for employers who break labor laws.

Intended to reduce management intimidation of workers who want to unionize, the Employee Free Choice Act is the labor movement’s top legislative priority. Supporters of the bill believe it could sign up millions of new union members. Republicans have vowed to filibuster the measure, which would require corporate Democrats have been reluctant to get behind the bill.

In a capitalist system, too many people have too much money and too much power, while too many people have too little of both,” Harkin said. “And one of the functions of government is to right this imbalance.”

**Stella D’oro strikers stay strong**

From the time in September that the bakery’s president, Vincent Persinger, first visited the picket line outside the Stella D’oro cookie factory in the Bronx, she knew she had to get involved.

“I grew up in a union family and I learned that when you see a picket line you should stop and ask what’s going on and how you can help,” said Persinger, an assistant professor at Bronx Community College.

So the PSC chapter at BCC invited the president of the union local at Stella D’oro to a chapter executive council meeting in September to discuss what they could do. A member of the Hostos chapter leadership also attended, and the two chapters passed a resolution in support of the strike to the September PSC Delegate Assembly.

Union delegates voted to back the strike, urging members to join the strikers at an upcoming rally. Since then the PSC’s solidarity work has unfolded on multiple fronts.

**How can we help?**

In a time of economic crisis, the long-running battle has attracted growing support as an example of working-class resistance to concessions and downward pressure on wages. PSC members have worn the picket line for hours, collected thousands of dollars in personal donations for the strike fund, organized holiday parties for the strikers’ families, promoted a consumer boycott and participated in a city-wide strike support committee.

The PSC’s statewide affiliate, New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), has also joined the fray, sending a busload of members to an April 27 rally and helping to publicize the boycott.

“If we allow the Stella D’oro workers’ union to be butchered, that’s bad for all unions,” said Lenny Dick, an adjunct in mathematics at BCC. As it becomes rarer for private-sector workers to have decent health benefits or pensions, said Dick, public-sector employers become more likely to ask, “How can these professors, or high school teachers or welfare workers expect to have decent benefits when nobody else does?”

**Morale up 100%**

Stella D’oro striker captain Oscar Hernandez, who studied electrical engineering at City College, credits the support of his members and other unionists spent on the picket line for boosting the strikers’ morale. “We feel like we’re not alone anymore,” he said.

“In the beginning it was kind of just us, and there are not too many of us,” explained fellow striker Jerry Fleck. “The morale has definitely been lifted 100%.”

The 136 Stella D’oro workers, who belong to the Bakery, Confectionary, Tobacco Workers and Grain Millers International Local 50, struck on August 13. They refused to accept company demands such as a $5-an-hour wage cut (over five years), the loss of five vacation days and 12 sick days, plus increased health care costs. Workers had earned about $37 an hour.

Stella D’oro is owned by Brynwood Partners, a Greenwich, CT-based private equity firm that bought the company from Kraft Foods in 2006. Brynwood said the proposed cuts were due to “boatload labor costs” — but refused to open its books during contract negotiations.

**Microcosm**

Brynwood’s anti-union tactics have drawn scrutiny from the local office of the National Labor Relations Board, which issued a “refusal to bargain” complaint against the company.

On May 11, an administrative law judge is expected to rule on the complaint.

“Stella D’oro is...a microcosm of what’s been happening in corporate America for the past two decades — and what urgently needs to be fixed,” said the International Union of Food Workers (IUF), the world-wide federation that includes the bakery union. “Stella D’oro is a classic example of a profitable company which has been drained and shrunken in the quest for quick gains and then turned over to the financial markets to leverage out the last bit of cash.”

The model, the IUF explained, is essentially the same as the “leveraged buy-out” boom in the 1980s, portrayed in the film Wall Street in which Michael Douglas famously declared, “Greed is good!” By the year 2000, the IUF explained the name was changed “to the friendlier sounding ‘private equity,’ but the mechanisms were the same.”

Chesu to Brynwood’s hardline position can also be found in a press release it issued, stating that a private equity firm like Brynwood can “make even more easily cut labor costs than a firm (like Kraft) whose stock is publicly traded, ‘because the unions do not have the same leverage to resist necessary changes.’”

Brynwood presented itself to investors as a tough operator that could force the union to give in. But Local 50 has proven to be stronger than Brynwood expected. Though the strike has now lasted for more than nine months, not a single Stella D’oro striker has crossed the picket line.

“The union at Stella D’oro is trying to buck a tide of declining real wages and union concessions, and unions from across NYC want to help them win. As the walkout marked its fourth month last December, strikers and supporters from the PSC and several other unions formed the Committee in Support of the Stella D’oro Strikers. Operating at first as a local solidarists, the committee has since become the nexus of Stella D’oro organizing. Community support for the strike has been nurtured by a number of social events, including a December holiday party for the children and grandchildren of the strikers organized by the PSC.”

“Sometimes you hear about a network of solidarity,” said Lizette Cutler, president of the PSC. “This is not just a slogan: it is what makes it possible for them to win.”

“I believe there is something empowering about connecting with others in the union movement,” Cutler explained. Labor solidarity, he said, makes us “part of something much bigger, that is so key to our democracy and to our economic well-being.”

“They’ve been doing a tremendous job,” Stella D’oro striker Jerry Fleck said of the support from the PSC, NYSUT and other unions. “And the numbers are increasing. It keeps getting bigger and bigger” For Fleck and other strikers, solidarity is more than a slogan: it is what makes it possible for them to win.

For more info, see www.stelladorostrike2009.com.
Unemployment insurance reform

By JOHN TARLETON

State Senator Shirley Huntley was already sympathetic to a proposed bill that would close a loophole in the law universities use to prevent adjuncts from receiving unemployment insurance. But it was listening to PSC members on a lobbying visit to Albany that sparked her idea on how to convince fellow legislators.

Adjunct Josh Gosciak described the low pay and perennial lack of job security he has experienced in eight years teaching media studies and literary theory at CCNY and St. John’s University. “It’s hard to accept that you are treated as a disposable workforce when there is no job security from term to term,” Gosciak remarked as Huntley listened from behind her desk.

Huntley mused aloud that she bays off most of her capitol office staff when the legislative session ends in June and that they are eligible for unemployment even if they may get rehired in the fall. And then she had a brainstorm about how she could help make the case for the bill when discussing it with her colleagues.

“When I speak about it, I’ll bring up the example of what I do with my own staff,” Huntley said, “and what a lot of us do with our staff.”

PSC activists Iris DeLutro and Eileen Moran asked Huntley to review a packet of materials from the PSC, including a four-page analysis with a point-by-point rebuttal of the CUNY administration’s exaggerated claims about the expense of the proposed legislation (S4125/A0613A). They emphasized that CUNY could avoid payment of unemployment insurance to any adjuncts for whom it guaranteed class assignments, instead of leaving them twirling in the wind with conditional letters of reappointment.

The reform bills have the support of the chairs of both the State Senate and Assembly Labor Committees. The PSC team urged Huntley to be a strong voice for the measure when the chancellors of CUNY and SUNY try to pressure Senate Majority Leader Malcolm Smith to scrap it.

Huntley’s visit to Huntley’s office was a part of a coordinated day-long effort orchestrated by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), the PSC’s 400,000-member state affiliate. With just a few weeks left in the legislative session, 540 NYSUT members fanned out through a complex of legislative office buildings to promote a common five-point agenda.

IMPACT

Mutual aid, or solidarity, is basic to building union power, and this diverse group of educators put it into practice. K-12 teachers joined PSC members in the fight on adjunct unemployment insurance, while PSC activists spoke out against regressive caps on property taxes, which fund the public schools. All opposed pension plan changes for future State employees while urging support for seasonal unemployment benefits for farm workers and same-sex marriage.

Acustomed to feeling disrespected on the job, Gosciak was moved by what he saw. “I was overwhelmed by the immense solidarity in NYSUT and the current leadership of the PSC. It was nice to be in this open area where everybody is for you,” said Gosciak, who is helping to raise a 12-year-old daughter on earnings of over $24,000 per year.

The PSC’s 19-person delegation worked in five teams, visiting the offices of 34 State Senators and 11 Assembly members before the day was over. Team Four, which includ ed Gosciak, PSC veterans DeLutro and Moran, and this reporter, spoke directly with five state legislators and met with aides for two others.

“I love lobbying. It takes years. But I think it makes a difference,” said DeLutro, a longtime community activist in Queens who is also PSC vice president for cross campus units. Moran, former co-chair of the PSC Legislative Committee, agreed. “The PSC has been successful in Albany,” she said. “But it always requires perseverance, especially during economic downturns.”

The personal stories of adjuncts like Gosciak helped get legislators’ attention. DeLutro said, and made the union’s lobbying campaign more compelling.

Gosciak said he thought the group’s efforts had made an impact on Joseph Addabbo Jr., a freshman State Senator from Queens who won a longtime Republican seat last fall.

System excludes adjuncts

By SARAH BECK

Federal law excludes educators from obtaining unemployment insurance if they are given “reasonable assurance” of employment the following semester. But what exactly does “reasonable assurance” mean? CUNY adjunct Demetri Kapetanakos has been pondering this question since last year.

Kapetanakos was scheduled to teach an ethnic studies class at John Jay College in Spring 2008, but the course was canceled three days before the semester began. With this loss of crucial income, he was forced to depend on meager funds. “I lived off of $3,300 for the entire semester,” Kapetanakos told Clarion.

When an adjunct is given a letter of reappointment for the next semester, CUNY maintains that this makes him or her ineligible for unemployment insurance (UI) in the intervening weeks. But when next semester arrives, adjuncts may be told that the courses they prepared for without compensation have been canceled. Nor will the college UI while unemployed due to John Jay’s month-long winter break, it would have lessened his economic hardship in the spring.

TENURE

Adjuncts soon learn that a letter of reappointment assures them of nothing. “You work at CUNY long enough to know it’s always tenuous,” said Jonathan Holley, an adjunct in Kingsborough Community College’s English department, whose class was canceled unexpe ctedly last winter.

One longtime CUNY adjunct, who requested anonymity, told Clarion she almost became homeless one summer because of a sudden cancellation of UI. “The “reasonable assurance” rule dates to 1970, when federal law was revised to cover public sector employees under unemployment insurance. Congress was concerned that K-12 school employees, who are paid a 12-month salary over 10 months, might “double dip” and receive unemployment benefits during the summer when they did not receive a regular paycheck.

The situation of part-time college faculty, however, is very different. They are contingent workers employed on a per-semester-per-course basis, and they are paid an hourly rate for hours in the classroom. Their work lives resemble those of employees in other seasonal industries who are entitled to unemployment benefits employed during the summer when they did not receive a regular paycheck.

The PSC is pressing for passage of legislation that would clarify the application of the “reasonable assurance” rule in New York state (see above). S4125 in the State Senate and A0613A in the Assembly would establish that conditional letters of reappointment would count as the contingent nature of adjunct employment. (CUNY would have to overcome this provision, which fund the public schools. All opposed pension plan changes for future State employees while urging support for seasonal unemployment benefits for farm workers and same-sex marriage.

Should you file for unemployment?

Your claim may be contested by CUNY, says WDL Executive Direc tor Dave Sanders. The best case you have the right to appeal. In rare cases, adjuncts have initially been awarded UI but later told to pay the money back. This is why, according to the PSC, adj uncts find that seeking UI can be a time-consuming battle — but those who succeed say it’s worth it.

To join local lobbying visits to legis lators’ district offices, contact Amanda Maglapha at (212) 354-1252.
Students raise voices

Speaking out at campus hearings

No time to study

Jiaxin Huang, sophomore at Brooklyn College, double major in physics and Spanish, pre-med, NYPiRG member:

Our current financial aid system already leaves too many people out. I fell through the cracks this semester – and I am only one individual who lost her financial aid before the proposed budget cuts.

Working students would have to work more hours to afford the increase in tuition, but by working more hours, these students are less likely to be able to concentrate on their schoolwork.

My lap is my desk

Meghan Moore, sophomore at BMCC, liberal arts major, NYPiRG member:

If the governor’s proposed funding cuts pass, or if the City makes similar cuts, I hear that BMCC may be forced to allow class size to increase. They’re already too big.

This semester I’m enrolled in an English class. Every day, as an incentive to show up early for class, I go there hoping to find a seat. Most of the time, if I’m early, I’m lucky. But on the times that I’m not, I am forced to sit on the windowsill. I have learned quite well how to take notes when I don’t have a desk, just with a notebook on my lap, but that’s not a task I should have to master as a student.

Keep CUNY for all

Ruby McDonald, student at City Tech, human services major, NYPiRG member:

I came to this country with a dream, and I discovered the door through which I can enter to get that dream to become reality is CUNY.

I ask everyone in this room to fight this tuition hike. I have disabilities, and I’m going to fight. In this tough economic time, it’s important that we keep CUNY affordable so that we don’t push students out.

I wasn’t even able to buy books this semester because I was out of work because of my disability. I copied the books. I’m asking members of the Senate, members of the government who are here, to reject the CUNY tuition hike. Students, let our voices be heard!

NYC’s real wealth

Roderrick Wells, student at LaGuardia, philosophy major: This is not the time to do the standard thing and stay inside the box. Politicians who are trying to get re-elected should be leaders who change the world.

Look around this campus and you will see the real wealth of this city.

CUNY cuts force people back on welfare

Marina Delgado, first-year student in the clinical nursing program at Hostos, mother of two: Thanks to CUNY I’ve been able to do things I never thought I would do. If you cut CUNY during a recession, that is going to force a lot of people to go back on welfare and that’s not going to help anybody.

Tuition hike fears

Jonathan Garcia, senior at Baruch: I’ve been at Baruch a really long time because I don’t make that much money, even living with my parents. So at times I’ve taken a semester off so I can save a little bit to go to school. My parents always help me out; I try to help them out. But even the slightest increase in this tuition would be hard for us.

Just hearing that it might go up frightened me because I’m not sure if I can even come to college. I’m in my senior year, and I’m thinking, ‘How am I going to get the money for that?’

Some of you [speaking at the hearing] have said some of the students are sleeping in class. I can relate to that. I got lucky and I got a job. I do the overnight. Right when I come out of work, I can go straight to school.

There are other students just like me. I talk to them, they tell me, ‘I don’t know what I’m going to do.’ They might move out of state. They’re saying, ‘I’ll take a year off from school.’ But what are the odds that they will come back? This tuition hike, it’s affecting people, it’s affecting their lives. It’s affecting the future.

That this is going to have on the future of this country...I am one person, but there are millions of other students who are like me, students who have kids to take care of. How dare they try and take this away from me! I refuse to go down with that.

How am I going to get the money to go back to school? ‘But what are the odds that they will come back? This tuition hike, it’s affecting people, it’s affecting their lives. It’s affecting the future.’
The PSC was the lead organizer for nine campus budget hearings this semester that together drew a total of 1,300 people. The events educated local politicians, inspired student activists and helped strengthen the organizing work of several local PSC chapters.

LaGuardia students turned out en masse May 7 for the last of nine campus budget hearings held this semester.

**Budget hearings draw 1,300**

**By JOHN TABLETON**

Spring semester push by PSC

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Annie Hauck-Lawson & the ‘food voice’

At a neighborhood market, takeout, or grow-your-own, Annie Hauck-Lawson knows what food has to say.

Hauck-Lawson described growing up in the center of Park Slope in the ‘60s and ‘70s, with a “multicultural sense of New York.” Her parents took her fishing and clamming, and kept animals in the backyard that eventually became food: duck, rabbit, turkey, pigeons and even a pig. The family traveled through the neighborhoods of Brooklyn, following an internal map to places to gather or buy foods — and these experiences created Hauck-Lawson’s own “food voice.”

She coined the term while conducting a research project among Polish immigrants in Greenpoint, but her own food voice had already existed for years. “Food is a way for people to express different aspects of their identity,” Hauck-Lawson explained. For example, two recent immigrants may choose to eat different foods depending on the parts of their identities they want to emphasize. A Polish teenager might choose to eat hamburgers and Chinese take-out to show he is an American, while an adult woman may cook pierogies and kielbasa as a way to symbolically assert her Polish identity.

“Without words, food serves as voice on both the individual and communal levels,” said Hauck-Lawson. “It seemed so obvious, but no one had put those words together before.” The term offers a way to understand the role and meanings of food in people’s lives. When you explore the foods of Brooklyn, she said, you explore people’s culture and identity, both individual and communal. You can be sure you’ll learn more about yourself as well.

In a grocery at 980 Coney Island Avenue, Hauck-Lawson examined the produce. Shiny gala apples looked out of place next to knobby karela — also known as bitter melon — and a long green squash, onions, potatoes and turnips. The strong scents of turmeric and cumin filled the air of the aisle stocked floor to ceiling with bagged spices, legumes, rice in 20 pound bags and chapathi flour. Mix boxes lined the next shelves, instant chapathi, biryani, and meat and fish sauces with their contents labeled in eight languages.

Residents of the nearby apartments, on the edge of Ditmas Park, are mostly families, she said. But the mix boxes are popular with South Asian immigrant men who may be living in the US without wives or mothers or sisters and who have to cook for themselves.

Back on the street, Hauck-Lawson peered through the tinted windows of Bahar, the Afghan Kebab House, plastered with signs advertising the food. At the back of the room, a huge flatscreen TV held pride of place — on which a woman in a white sari and a man in Western clothing sang to each other in a forest.

Hauck-Lawson indicated the woman behind the counter, and noted that she was probably not from the same community as the owner. “According to my students’ reports, it may not be considered proper for women within this community to serve men who are not in their family,” she explained. And in fact, while the owners are Afghan, the waitress was Mexican and said she serves a wide mix of customers.

“Neighborhoods used to be more clearly demarcated along ethnic lines,” Hauck-Lawson noted. But as the family-owned businesses became scarcer in the city and both residential and commercial rents went up, “those lines became more blurred.”

The lines are still there, but their patterns are more complex, and Hauck-Lawson has explored the vibrant and changing communities in a book called Gastropolis, about food and the social fabric of New York City. Co-edited with Jonathan Deutsch, assistant professor and director of the Culinary Management Center at Kingsborough Community College, it includes essays on food and society in New York before the arrival of Europeans; the narratives underlying a range of immigrant cuisines; melting pot hybrids like Mt. Olympus bagels or Puerto Rican lasagna; and the roles of street vendors and restaurants in neighborhoods.

Hauck-Lawson gives full credit to her co-editor and the volume’s many contributors for whatever insights it has to offer; eight of the 20 authors, she noted, are affiliated with CUNY.

Hauck-Lawson went on to paint a compelling picture of different aspects of food life in the city, “she said, though it is necessarily incomplete: “There are many food voices in New York as there are New Yorkers.”
Tax withholding and pensions

By PETER HOGNESS
The National Education Association (NEA) has been working to remedy an unintended consequence of the federal stimulus bill that could cause financial hardship for retirees. The problem could cause some retirees to have too little money withheld from their pension checks to cover taxes, leaving them with an unexpected tax bill on April 15.

After the stimulus bill was passed, new tax withholding tables were issued by the IRS to reflect the new “Making Work Pay” credit on earned income that was part of the stimulus bill. Though pension benefits are not considered earned income and so are not eligible for the Making Work Pay credit, the IRS nonetheless instructed payers of retirement benefits to use the new federal withholding tables.

UNDER-WITHOLDING

In many cases this would result in under-withholding on pension income, and these retirees, most of whom are on fixed incomes, would then find themselves unexpectedly owing taxes at the end of the year. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), retiree organizations and state pension officials, the NEA urged the IRS to address the problem. (New York State United Teachers is affiliated with both the NEA and the AFT)

ADJUSTMENT PROCEDURE

At the end of May the IRS responded by announcing an optional “adjustment procedure” that pension plans can use to avoid under-withholding. For a monthly pension check of between $1,273 and $6,153, for example, this adjustment would increase the withholding amount by $44. (For a monthly pension check of more than $7,633, no additional withholding is suggested.)

But because this procedure is optional for payers of retirement benefits, and because the right amount of withholding can be affected by other factors, the NEA suggests that retirees who use automatic withholding check with a professional to make sure their withholding amounts are set correctly. “Individual situations are different, so the key is to consult an accountant or a professional financial advisor,” said Alfred Campos, an NEA federal lobbyist.

The NYCC Teachers Retirement System told Clarion it is has been following the issue closely. “When the new withholding tables were implemented this spring, TRS notified our members through our website and later through our retiree newsletter,” said spokesperson Matt Laskowski. “We mentioned that the new tables generally result in higher net payments and lower withholding – and we reminded retirees how they can change their withholding elections at any time.”

NEW TAX TABLES

The IRS’s new optional “adjustment procedure” was announced just before Clarion went to press, and at press time TRS was examining this option. “If the withholding tables are adjusted again, TRS will announce the change on our website, so we ask our members to visit www.trs.nyc.ny.us regularly,” Laskowski said.

Rule change may cause some unintended problems.

By JOHN TARLETON
Dr. Jane Young was remembered as a passionately dedicated teacher, scholar and union activist at a May 20 memorial ceremony at BMCC that brought together more than 100 friends and colleagues.

“She practically opened the college,” said retired BMCC professor Howard Prince, reflecting on Young’s 15-year tenure at BMCC that began in 1966, two years after the school first opened its doors. “It was an opportunity to bring her and everything life brought.”

GRACE

PSC President Barbara Bowen said that Young faced her own mortality with extraordinary grace. “Jane was equal to the task of dying. That’s really all I want to say about her, but it’s a lot,” Bowen said.

“The most difficult thing we have to do is to speak of death, and Jane and I, our elegant, seemingly fragile but actually made-of-steel Jane – was up to the task. Jane had looked death straight in the eye, without either sentimentality or denial, and taken it on. Without hiding her grief, she made it clear that she had had an undiminished capacity for the pleasures of life.”

Participants at the service marveled at Young’s energy. “She threw herself into the work of being a PSC chapter chair at BMCC from 2001 to 2008. ‘Lately did we know the intensity she would bring to the job, and little did we know that 9/11 would happen 10 days after she started,’” said Bill Friedheim, a longtime colleague of Young at BMCC.

The college lost six of its students on 9/11, and one of the school’s main buildings was damaged beyond repair. Young led the fight for an indoor environment – and when results showed the college’s ventilation system the union worked to ensure that the entire system would be cleaned.

“She was a woman who rose to the occasion,” said Anne Friedman, PSC vice president for community colleges. “She was willing to do what few people are ever willing to do and she realized how grateful we are for that.”

BMCC Vice President of Administration and Planning Scott Anderson said that most of all, Young was “a human being who tried to make the world a much better place than she found it.”

“Whatever we talk about always had nothing but mutual respect for each other,” said BMCC professor James Blake of Young and partner Phil, “I think that she would be happy and say, ‘Keep fighting.’ And she would say, ‘I intend to do that.’”

Young was always looking for ways to teach the basics of writing to her students was also recalled. Her “passion for the students making progress” was described by Fransis Elmi, professor of English at the college. “She was theatrical and very intense and wanted to keep the students from being distracted from what they were doing,” said Elmi. “She was tough but kind, which was what they needed.”

PASSION

“I will always continue writing because of her,” said BMCC sopomore Christina Gonzales, who was taking an intensive writing course with Young in Spring 2008 when Young was diagnosed with terminal cancer. “The thing I remember her saying is, ‘Don’t give up. Don’t give up.’”

Rochelle Weinstein, chair of the BMCC English and art department, recalled first meeting Young when they shared an apartment together in Chelsea in 1963. “I shall always think of her as a strong young woman of imagination and courage. She will be forever young to me,” Weinstein said.

Young died of mesothelioma on April 10. She was 68.

Jane Young in the spring of 2001, speaking at a teach-in on the CUNY budget.
FLU & FEAR

Dangerous outbreak of ignorance

By DAVE KOTELCHUCK


T he H1N1 virus is now traveling around the world causing flu, mild in many countries but severe in some. During May, hospital officials reported two confirmed deaths in New York City. But this flu epidemic, originally called swine flu, is more than just a virus causing human harm. As CUNY faculty member Philip Alcabes makes clear in his fine new book Dread: How Fear and Fantasy Have Fueled Epidemics from the Black Death to Avian Flu, epidemics also give rise to narratives by which human populations try to understand what has happened and seek to make sense of it.

Given the intensity of the discussion in the US recently about immigration from Mexico, it is not surprising that some would use the current flu epidemic, with its apparent origins in Mexico, to blame undocumented immigrants for its spread. For example, Jack Canfield of CNBC News said in late April that we should have secured the 2,000 mile border after 9/11 because “all these illegal immigrants who we let come in some of whom may have brought this in.”

RUNONS SPREAD

Fox News commentator Michelle Malkin said the outbreak confirmed her past warnings of “the spread of contagious diseases from around the world into the US as a result of uncontrolled immigration” (tinyurl.com/MalkinFlu). But there is no evidence that the virus was first brought to the US by undocumented immigrants, and it is in fact unlikely. As Ruben Navarrette Jr. noted in the San Diego Union-Tribune, undocumented immigrants tend not to go back and forth across the border. “More often, they stay on this side of the border rather than pay additional smuggling fees or risk their lives trying to re-enter the United States.” And Mexican immigration to this country has now dipped to historically low levels, due to the US economic recession. A more likely suspect in this case, said would be “someone who could travel freely between the countries,” such as a US citizen or legal immigrant. And in fact, the first reported cases in NYC were at St. Francis Preparatory School in Queens, where students had just gone on a spring break trip to Cancun.

AGIRBUSESS ROLE?

But let’s not kid ourselves, this perception about Mexican immigrants bringing swine flu into the US lives on in the minds of many Americans, even if hopefully such opinions are not prevalent in New York City. As Navarrette said in the same article: “Ignorance is infectious.”

What has gotten less attention in public discussion is the possibility that the virus in question might have originated at a giant industrial-size hog farm (one million animals) in Veracruz State, owned jointly by the Mexican firm Granjas Carroll and the US-based Smithfield Farms, the largest such company in the world. Residents of the area, like those in North Carolina in the US, had been protesting the stench and disposal of waste for many months. It is also possible that these industrial farms may serve as a “petri dish” for the spread of a cross-species viral infection.

Do we know definitively that the hogs from Smithfield-Granjas Carroll were the source of the virus that appeared to cross over from swine to humans in Mexico? No, we don’t. Only detailed study, which is now going on and will continue for many months into the future, will be able to discern the environmental conditions that may have given rise to this epidemic and allow us to avoid such conditions in the future. But we do know that such epidemics will appear again, if not in this form in another. And persistent vigilance as well as continued funding for epidemic surveillance is imperative. We can’t let our guard down, as we did for tuberculosis in the 1970s after the disease appeared to be under control, only to break out again in the 1980s with renewed virulence.

Unfortunately, while Republican lawmakers raised against President Obama’s stimulus bill as laden with “pork,” Karl Rove and Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) argued that an 8870 million allocation for pandemic preparedness should be taken out of the bill—and they succeeded. This cut in the proposed funding came when many state public health departments were already reeling from budget cuts.

Central to fighting such epidemics effectively in the future are a strong public health system and expanded access to health care. If those are missing, people too often leave infections untreated until they are at their most severe. This appears to be what happened in Mexico, contributing to a higher fatality rate there.

NOT JUST A ‘BUG’

Again, as Dr. Alcabes notes in his book Dread, “A plague epidemic is not just an illness gone out of control; it is a natural event, one that involves many changes in the environment and whose effects resonate throughout ecosystems….It happens only when the circumstances are aligned just so, when an improbable junction of climate, diet, human social arrangements, animal and insect population dynamics, and the natural movement of germs happens to occur.”

The keys, then, to combating this risk are better understanding and active management of our larger social, physical and biological environment.

FLU & FEAR

Immigrant-bashing won’t help public health

POEMS

Four by Marie Ponsot

Bliss and Grief

No one is here right now.

The Good

The plot is simple: a travelling man is mugged on a lonely street, robbed, beaten, and left to bleed. The few who hear his groans won’t stop. They don’t want to get sucked in. Then he hears someone: a Samaritan, a travelling man from the ghetto. He groans again & it works. He’s saved.

As I gnaw this old bone I sink to the marrow: my late father, in sudden fresh recall. He said righteousness is shown less by the short halt to help a stranger than by evoking others’ genius, then going on to do the work that he knew was his own.

Mercy praises Justice: the Samaritan acts to do exactly all he can.

Real Estate: Kripplebush, New York

Having measured all the edges and seen the dry-ridge landmarks of the property, the salesman sells it (whatever that means). Lawyers search title, convey deeds, decree (whatever that means) it belongs to me.

I search too. True titles of this place are: Green (evergreen) and Sky (fluency, canopy).

Low among leaves & needles, winds careen with rushed sounds of water – and cross the sky lipping like water changing its ground.

These deeds are unenjoyed, and simplify beyond all measure into moving sound.

I wake to walk here, walk to learn my bounds.

Peter Rabbit’s Middle Sister

Mopsy, you were in your briar patch birthplace the trustworthy sister, who ate blackberries with cream & kept the floors swept.

You came back promptly when sent out to fetch brown bread for supper, while your reprobate brother adventured, broke things, got caught, leapt free, lost his shirt, got scolded till you botched your homework and cried for him till you slept. Your grief was seeing him stand there wretched reproached for his deeds. Not he, you, wept, your chest hot, your heart fast in the thorned tale clutch of your hedge-hemmed root-safe bedtime.

We realist rabbits wrongly denigrate your hedge-hemmed root-safe bedtime.
Why oppose tuition hikes?

Tuition at CUNY senior colleges will be raised next Fall by $606. Now, as the City decides how much aid it will give to CUNY next year, Chancellor Goldstein has proposed a $350 increase in tuition for CUNY’s two-year colleges. The PSC argues that raising tuition is bad for CUNY – here’s why:

Q I understand that tuition increases are unpopular, but don’t we need them to improve CUNY’s budget?

A Tuition hikes are an ineffective strategy for increasing CUNY’s budget. In the 1990s, tuition was raised four times – but CUNY’s real-dollar budget actually went down! By the end of the decade, CUNY had $245 million less in real dollars.

The record shows that New York State has used tuition increases as an excuse to reduce State funding for CUNY. Tuition is used to fill the hole created by withdrawal of public funds – but often doesn’t fill it completely. Tuition hikes have put public universities on a path towards less and less public funding over time. In 1989, tuition accounted for 12% of CUNY’s budget. By 2006, it was 42%. To see where this can lead, look at the University of Michigan, where 64% of the $245 million shortfalls in real dollars.

Q What has been decided so far on senior college tuition?

A The Board of Trustees voted to authorize increases in tuition of up to $600 for the senior colleges. Underfunding by the State and CUNY’s readiness to fill that hole with increased tuition have led to the enactment of a $600 increase at the senior colleges, effective this Fall.

Q What happens to the money from that $600 increase?

A According to CUNY’s budget office, 60% of the tuition increase will stay with the University. In effect, CUNY students are being hit twice. The告诉大家 text is not fully visible, so we cannot provide a complete answer to this question.

Q So the senior college tuition increase has been approved; what about the community colleges?

A The decision on community college tuition will likely be influenced by the City budget, which must be resolved by June 30. That’s why the union’s budget campaign has now shifted to the City. The CUNY trustees authorized a community college tuition hike of up to $400, and Chancellor Goldstein has proposed a $350 increase. Whether that is imposed will be determined by whether the City Council votes for the additional funds CUNY needs.

A Tuition hikes would mean that the City is essentially asking CUNY students, among the city’s poorest residents, to pay down a deficit they nothing to create.

Q A $350 increase for community college tuitions sounds fairly modest. Doesn’t it make sense for students to do their part and pay a little more?

A For poor families in the middle-class New Yorkers, $350 would mean a meal with friends at a good restaurant, a bottle of wine, or one night at a moderately priced New York hotel. But for CUNY students, $350 can be a couple of weeks’ wages.

Q When State raises tuition, it cuts funding.

A According to Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, “It is economically preferable to raise taxes on those with high incomes” than to cut public expenditures. “Budget cuts reduce the total level of spending,” Stiglitz explains, and this makes an economic slowdown worse. Since the rich spend less of their income, raising their taxes makes for less public spending has a net stimulative effect.

A A modest progressive income tax reform that was approved at the State level will generate an extra $400 million for next year’s budget; a stronger reform measure could have avoided the senior college tuition hike.

A Mayor Bloomberg has strongly opposed similar progressive income tax reform at the City level. He has warned that raising taxes on the rich, even by just 1%, would make these wealthiest taxpayers leave town. But the Independent Budget Office reports that the top City income tax rate is at a historically low level – and that when it was raised in 2003, “there is no evidence that these affluent New Yorkers left the city.”

A A community college tuition increase is essentially a regressive tax on some of the poorest New Yorkers, and that’s bad economics.

Q I’m sympathetic, but I’m not sure this is really my issue. I’ll have enough to do for my courses next semester.

A Increasing tuition is only part of CUNY’s strategy; the other part is to increase enrollment. The loss of public funding means that the net result will be fewer resources per student. This will mean speedup, an increased workload for everyone, and raised anxiety for your students the best education. All this will affect you directly – unless you help to prevent it.

Q I work at a four-year college. Why should I care about community college tuition?

A Because it affects the institution as a whole and continues the pattern of underfunding by City and State. If we don’t protest when the City seeks to use our students as a cash machine, then the privatization of the cost of CUNY deepens. So does the habit of cramming more and more students into our classrooms to make up for the lack of public investment, and that affects everyone who works at CUNY.

Q Can we really stop a community college tuition increase?

A Yes, but it will not be easy. In the annual budget ritual, the mayor routinely cuts CUNY funding and the City Council routinely restores it. This year we’re asking the Council to go beyond restorations to make additions to the budget. That’s the economic strategy that really makes sense in a recession – public investment. The City would have to allocate $30 million beyond restorations to prevent a tuition increase. This can be done; earlier this year, the Council discussed some limited, progressive changes to the City’s income tax structure that would raise about $1 billion.

To make your voice heard, see page 12.
By BARBARA BOWEN
FACULTY RIGHTS

No term limits on dept. chairs

Dear Colleagues:

My subject this month is Chancellor Goldstein’s dangerous proposal to undermine faculty governance by imposing term limits on department chairs. But I want to begin by saying that I am delighted to be writing to you again as your union president. Thank you for the strong support you gave the other New Caucus candidates and me in the recent union election. We recognize what a privilege it is to receive that support, and we are determined to build on it and rise to the occasion of the current economic and political moment.

Our first opportunity for renewed unity comes early: in the closing days of the semester, Chancellor Goldstein, without any prior discussion with the union or discussion in the Faculty Senate committee, proposed that the CUNY Bylaws be amended to impose a two-term limit on department chairs. Reaction was swift and unequivocal. The University Faculty Senate passed a unanimous resolution opposing the change on May 5, and many college governance bodies and departments quickly followed suit. On May 21, the union convened a meeting of department chairs, in part to strategize on the issue, and that night we passed a unanimous resolution of opposition. Its central arguments are worth repeating here:

- Having failed in the attempt in the last round of bargaining to weaken department chairs and undermine faculty governance by removing department chairs from the union’s bargaining unit, Chancellor Goldstein is now attempting another move in the same direction through a proposed change in the Bylaws.
- The proposal to amend Section 9.1 of the CUNY Bylaws by imposing a limit of two consecutive terms on department chairs is an attack on faculty governance and on the union contract.
- The proposed change would affect the terms and conditions of employment for department chairs. Any such change is a matter for collective bargaining and would have to be negotiated with the PSC.
- The proposed change would undermine a fundamental right of CUNY’s full-time faculty – the right to elect and re-elect their own chairs – and would threaten the professional autonomy of all faculty and staff. The right to elect and re-elect department chairs is an essential faculty power at CUNY, and the presence of elected leaders from among the faculty – unlimited by arbitrary term limits – is central to the professional autonomy of all PSC members.
- The change is unnecessary: faculty already have the power to limit the terms of a department chair – by electing a new chair at the end of the term.
- The “explanation” provided by the Chancellor’s Office for the proposal is unconvincing at best, disingenuous at worst. It claims that the change is necessary “to give more faculty the opportunity to serve as chairpersons.” Every eligible faculty member already has the opportunity to serve as department chairperson. And if “fresh ideas” are as important as the proposal claims, why is there no need for term limits on management?
- Long-serving chairs can develop exceptional authority; they become linchpins not only of their departments but of their colleges, able to support – and when necessary, oppose – college management.
- Knowledgeable, experienced department chairs are especially critical as CUNY seeks to hire substantial numbers of new full-time faculty. Such chairs are especially well positioned to lead recruitment efforts and to offer guidance to untrained faculty.
- Experienced department chairs can also provide essential leadership at a time when CUNY relies increasingly on part-time faculty.
- Strong department chairs have special importance at an institution where chronic underfunding and policy decisions by management have meant that we lack many of the supports that are considered routine at other universities. At CUNY, collegiality is often the thing that sustains us.

If Chancellor Goldstein is interested in making the position of department chair more attractive to a wider range of CUNY faculty, he should propose additional support for department chairs – not term limits. Such support could include more reassigned time, more support for staff assistance, budget to assist with recruitment and hiring, and much more.

KEEP THE PRESSURE ON

The union’s resolution ends by calling on the Board of Trustees to reject the proposal if it comes before them.

Facing blistering criticism of the idea from almost every quarter, Chancellor Goldstein has now begun to dissociate himself from the proposal and has retreated from including it on the Board’s June agenda. He has also called on college presidents to discuss it on their campuses. Whether the proposal reappears in the fall depends largely on our organized participation in those discussions and our ability to keep the pressure on. Sign the union’s online petition opposing the proposal at www.psc-cuny.org and attend your union chapter meeting early next fall, where the issue is likely to be raised. Let’s use our power, working together, to force a reconsideration of one of 80th Street’s worst ideas.

PSC opposes 80th Street’s proposal.

Dwight Hopper