The PSC asked its members to describe the impact of CUNY’s low salaries, and the stories streamed in. Members told of personal hardships – and the damage done to CUNY as an institution by years of uncompetitive pay. Low salaries cause problems in retaining CUNY faculty, wrote Paula Gannon of Hostos (above), which exacts a cost in student retention and graduation rates. She summed it up this way: “If you want to keep CUNY students, keep CUNY faculty.”
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

CUNY connection to ‘The Great Debaters’

Readers may be interested to know the historical connection between CUNY and the film The Great Debaters, reviewed in the February Clarion. Hobart Sidney Jarrett, a survivor of the Tulsa race riots, was on the legendary Wiley College debate team portrayed in the film. After graduating from Wiley, he studied at Harvard and earned a PhD from Syracuse. Dr. Jarrett taught at Langston University (1937-1949), Bennett College (1949-1961) and finally Brooklyn College (1961-1986) where he was professor of English—the first African-American to become a full professor in Brooklyn College’s English Department. He became professor emeritus in 1986 and passed away in 2005.

While at Bennett, Dr. Jarrett was also president of the Greensboro Citizens Association (1959-1961) and served as an advisor to the students who conducted sit-ins at Greensboro lunch counters. Hobart Jarrett’s wife, professor Gladys W. Jarrett, was a charter faculty member in the library at York College, later serving as York’s chief librarian—a likely the first African-American woman to hold that position at CUNY. Gladys-Jarrett passed away in 2007. The Jarretts were remarkable both in their own careers and as a couple and helped to break down barriers at many institutions over many decades.

John Drobnicki
York College

Any adjunct gains should apply to all

- “Part-timer Proposal,” a letter in the February Clarion, suggested that some future modest sacrifices by full-time “one-class” instructors could underwrite substantial improvements for “full-time” adjuncts and the union as a whole. A review of the current contract would provide ample evidence that “one-classers” already have given more than one for the Gipper. New channeling of contract improvements to all adjuncts except single-class adjunct instructors simply would expand the gaps of reward within our bargaining unit.

Consider these questions:

How many one-class instructors are eligible for negotiated professional development funds? How many solo class instructors are not expected to provide weekly office hours, grants? How many one-class providers, despite longevity and decent evaluations, can even be considered for adjunct conversion lines? How many one-class instructors are eligible to purchase health insurance? Answers: none, none, none and none.

The wage/benefit inequities imposed by CUNY on “full-time” adjuncts are simply heartless; any additional future adjustments negotiated by CUNY on behalf of “one-class” adjuncts that are similar to the current contract disqualifications would be no less than shameful. Like young Oliver, finishing my tiny bowl of gruel, I ask, “Please sir, more—naw, what’s for dinner?”

James Bloch
John Jay College

PSC-CUNY grant committee

The PSC-CUNY Research Award Program is seeking faculty members to serve on the selection committee for grants in their areas of expertise. Faculty in different disciplines meet to establish guidelines for grant disbursement, form grant review panels, and select grant recipients. You can volunteer to join the University Committee on Research Awards (UCRA), or nominate colleagues. In-service allotment is available to faculty performing this service (6,000 over the three-year term).

The committee is looking for faculty to coordinate the following areas: anthropology; biology; classics; creative writing & English; earth & environmental science; interdisciplinary studies; law; criminal justice; politics & political science; philosophy; physics; urban studies.

Criteria for selection of UCRA members are:

1. evidence of continuing involvement in scholarship;
2. experience in receiving and administering grants and fellowships;
3. representation from a variety of CUNY colleges.

APPLICANTS WANTED
Applicants are recommended by the UFS Research Committee and appointed by the chancellor. Chairpersons, executive officers and personnel on the executive pay plan are not eligible. Candidates may hold a PSC-CUNY award at the time of their appointment, but may not apply for an award during their three-year service on the UCRA.

Nominees should forward a curriculum vitae including grants and fellowships received and research undertaken to: The Research Committee, University Faculty Senate, 555 East 80th Street, New York, NY 10028. Email their CVs to Stasia.Pasela@mail.cuny.ed. Closing date is April 30. For more information, call the UFS at (212) 794-5538.

PSC supports striking teachers

On April 6, a group organized by the PSC Retirees Chapter will attend the 3:00 matinee of “Our Dad Is In Atlantis” (April 4 to 20) at the Working Theater. Artists involved in the creation of this play will host a discussion afterwards. The show is at 45 Bleeker Street.

The play is a funny, tender story of two brothers left in Mexico after their widowed father leaves for the US to find work as well as a poignant drama about the political and legal issues of immigration.

The Working Theater has been NYC’s labor theater for the last 22 years.

Tickets are $19 for union members. Checks to “The Working Theater” can be mailed to Steve Cutler, 1501 Broadway, 15th floor, New York, NY 10003, or e-mail this information to Stasia.Pasela@mail.cuny.edu.

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PSC delegates, at their February meeting, passed a resolution supporting Puerto Rican teachers, who have been on strike since February 21. The teachers have worked under an expired contract for more than two years and seek better conditions in their classrooms as well as improvements to their salaries and health benefits.

Public workers’ strikes are illegal in Puerto Rico and the government has come down hard on the teachers—a move the PSC denounced. Above, supporters of the striking teachers rallied outside a Puerto Rican government office in Midtown Manhattan on March 4.
PSC: invest in CUNY now

Members lobby State Legislature

By PETER HOGNESS

PSC activists were in Albany on February 25 and 26, lobbying legislators to provide CUNY with the funds it needs and urging them to restore proposed cuts to the University’s budget.

In December, Governor Spitzer’s Commission on Higher Education put a spotlight on the damage to CUNY and SUNY from years of chronic underfunding. And the governor’s State of the State address emphasized the need for new investment in higher education — but his 2008-2009 budget proposal did not. Instead, the executive budget called for some cuts to CUNY’s budget and would not cover all mandatory cost increases.

CUTS

“Although we are very happy that Governor Spitzer has prioritized higher education, we are disappointed that the current budget proposal does not reflect this emphasis,” said Iris DeLutro, the PSC’s vice president for campus units. “A future endowment for CUNY and SUNY is a good idea, but CUNY and SUNY can’t wait — so the PSC is calling for restoration of budget cuts this year.”

The PSC lobbying delegation split up into different teams, meeting with several Senate and Assembly members at the same time. “The legislators we spoke with were sympathetic and interested but unwilling to commit themselves yet,” said Peter Jonas, a retiree officer on the PSC Executive Council. “They were awaiting the results of negotiations over to- tal amount of money that would be available,” he said, with those figures expected in mid-March.

KEY TIME

This means, Jonas said, that now is a key time for PSC members to contact their representatives (see page 12). “I would encourage every member to go to the Act Now page on the PSC website and send a message about the budget to Albany,” he said. “This is a critical time for them to hear from us.”

“We need to let everyone know that education cannot be the place where you disinvest,” said DeLutro. “Higher education is the economic engine for New York’s future, and it gives a good bang for the buck.” She noted that her campus, Queens College, opened during the Great Depression. “We can’t afford a zero year,” DeLutro said.

“REASONABLE”?

The definition of “reasonable assurance,” as defined by New York State’s law, is contingent on enrollment, budget and programmatic needs. Adjuncts often learn at the last minute that their class has been cut. The New York legislation supported by the PSC would give a firmer definition of “reasonable assurance,” so that CUNY cannot use a highly contingent offer to categorically exclude adjuncts from collecting unemployment compensation. A.2515 and S.4445 were developed by New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) and are sponsored by the Labor Committee chairs of the New York Assembly and State Senate, Assembl ywoman Sujuan John and State Senator Tom Maziarz.

This reform was first proposed by the PSC several years ago, with strong backing from NYSUT and has repeatedly received support from many legislators. The PSC has worked to build a broad state-wide coalition in support of unemployment insurance for adjuncts that now includes other public higher education unions and the New York State AFL-CIO.

These bills have consistently been opposed by CUNY and SUNY, which claim that the cost of paying unemployment benefits would be excessive for the universities, which are self-insurers.

“Our research indicates that CUNY and SUNY have significantly exaggerated the potential cost,” said Steve London, the PSC’s first vice president. “Their estimates amount to scare tactics. Under the proposed legislation, CUNY would have some obligation to pay unemployment in- surance, but only a modest amount. As a responsible employer, CUNY should not maintain it has the flexibility to deny employment to adjuncts at the last minute and also challenge adjuncts’ right to unemployment insurance when they are not working. In California and Washington state, similar laws have been passed that see to it that universities cannot engage in such practices.”

PSC activists are lobbying in Albany in support of A.2515 and S.4445 and will be visiting legislators in their local offices. (To stay informed about what you can do, sign up for the union’s weekly e-mail newsletter at www.psc-cuny.org.)

APPLY

In the meantime, the union is encouraging adjuncts to apply for unemployment insurance. Here’s how:

1. Apply for unemployment insurance.
2. Review the adjunkt’s credentials in the current employment.
3. Submit the application to your local offices.
4. Join the union that helps workers with unemployment insurance issues, will present a workshop on unemployment for adjuncts on May 9, from 4 to 6 pm at the PSC Union Hall.
Unified faculty voice at LaGuardia

Letter pushes president to open meeting

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Last month, faculty leaders at LaGuardia Community College won access for all faculty to an invitation-only campus meeting with Chancellor Matthew Goldstein. “It’s a big victory,” said PSC Chapter Chair Lorraine Cohen. “We succeeded because of the unity between the governance leaders and the union.”

The change came after Cohen and other faculty leaders sent an open letter to Goldstein and LaGuardia President Gail Mellow over the college’s e-mail system, expressing dismay that the February 20 meeting was limited to “a carefully tailored invitation list that initially included, in addition to administrators and faculty chairs, only untenured assistant professors.”

EXCLUSION

“It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that senior faculty, including the chair of the LaGuardia chapter of the Professional Staff Congress, have been deliberately excluded from the invitation list to avoid the airing of any but good news about the college,” wrote LaGuardia Faculty Council Chair Sally Mettler, College Senate Chair Lynne Teplin, PSC Chapter Chair Cohen, and Lenore Beaky, Vice Chair of the University Faculty Senate (UFS). The letter deplored “the exclusion of faculty voices, whether of union leaders or senior faculty, who may ask hard or critical questions.”

Cohen told Clarion that the closed meeting was an example of the continuation of the silencing of the union and of the faculty, “embodied in President Mellow’s ban on union communications over LaGuardia’s e-mail system, announced last semester.” LaGuardia PSC members have petitioned Mellow to withdraw the ban, and the PSC has filed both a grievance and a First Amendment lawsuit to overturn it. (See coverage in the UFS newsletter psccuny.org/Clarion/LAGCCfree speec.pdf.)

MEETING

The day after the open letter was sent, Mellow wrote back to say that the session with Goldstein would now be open. She later invited the four faculty leaders to meet with her on March 18 to discuss college communications.

Mellow’s response, however, also sought to justify the initial restrictions. “Dr. Goldstein’s visit is an opportunity to hear firsthand his vision for the University,” Mellow wrote. “We therefore primarily invited our faculty who have been here over the past several years...Many of them have not had that privilege.”

Understanding the disagreement, Cohen said, are two competing visions for CUNY and LaGuardia. “We want a democratic, open discussion. We don’t want it to be a controlled discussion,” she told Clarion. “Excluding senior faculty was the president’s effort to create a meeting where she had control over the agenda.”

Beaky, who teaches English at LaGuardia, first learned of Goldstein’s planned visit last fall, at a CUNY-wide meeting of governance leaders. “I waited for some notice or publicity, and none came,” she told Clarion. She asked Mettler and Teplin whether they had heard about the meeting; they hadn’t, she said. When she asked the chancellor’s office for an update, she learned that she and other senior faculty simply weren’t on the invitation list. “I don’t want to say that they sat around and said, ‘Let’s exclude,’” Beaky said. “But it’s hard to avoid the conclusion that we were excluded.”

DISMAY

“We all felt somewhat dismayed,” Mettler told Clarion. “If you’re going to get to know what’s going on, you’re going to want to hear from some of the tenured people who can speak more openly.” The open letter pointed out that meetings with Goldstein this year at many other campuses had been open to all. After Beaky’s inquiry, the open letter noted, “belated invitations” went to Beaky, Mettler and Teplin.

But all union leaders and the rest of the tenured faculty were still not invited, deepening the impression that college administration aimed to marginalize the union and avoid a wide-open discussion.

DISCOMFORT

“I was surprised to learn that the meeting was invitation only,” said one junior faculty member who asked to remain anonymous. “I was extremely uncomfortable as a result. Given the fact that I am renewed every year, I really don’t have the freedom to speak openly or even comment on what’s going on,” the faculty member told Clarion. “And in speaking with other junior faculty in my department, I learned that it was very uncomfortable not just for me. I really appreciated the freedom to work with the administration, they plan to continue working in coordination — and that, too, is a victory for LaGuardia faculty and staff, they said.

ACTION

“It is definitely true that it’s easier to work with the administration when the faculty and staff are unit- ed through the union, governance, senate,” Mettler said. “I’m very confident that a like-minded and coordinated effort will continue.” Beaky concurred, adding, “This is an opportunity to further our cooperation.”

“It’s not just about this one event,” said Cohen. “It shows that when faculty and staff speak out, when they make it clear that they are going to take action, when they know that something is being done to them and they organize against it, something can happen.”

PSC Chapter Chair Lorraine Cohen and Danny Lynch, a member of the Chapter Executive Committee, at LaGuardia.
CSEA member wins on marriage equality

By CANDICE JOHNSON

On February 1, a State appeals court ordered Monroe Community College in Rochester to recognize the marriage of college employee Patricia Martinez and her spouse, Lisa Ann Golden. The ruling held that same-sex marriages performed out of state must be officially recognized in New York.

“My spouse and I are thrilled beyond words with the decision,” said Martinez, who brought the suit against the college. “This is a historic, precedent-setting ruling that will change the landscape of marriage in New York State. It will change the way everyone looks at marriage.” The court’s decision applies to all employers in New York, both public and private.

Martinez, a member of the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), said members of her local have been extremely supportive. “The reaction from my co-workers and colleagues has been nothing less than amazing,” she told Clarion. “For the past two weeks, since the release of the ruling, staff and faculty alike have stopped by my office, called, or e-mailed me with congratulatory messages.”

While some may not understand the magnitude of the decision, they simply believe it’s the right thing for same-sex couples. What an amazing environment I work in!”

HISTORIC

In July 2004 Martinez and Golden were married in Canada, where same-sex marriages are recognized under the law. Within a week, the newlyweds Martinez applied to get health care benefits for Golden from her employer, Monroe Community College (MCC), where she is a word-processing supervisor. Five months later, the then-head of the college’s human resources department denied her application, on the ground that New York State law does not recognize same-sex marriage. The lawsuit, filed in 2006, was initially dismissed. But the appellate court found in Martinez and Golden’s favor, citing New York’s long-standing “marriage recognition rule.” For the past century, courts have repeatedly found if a marriage is legally valid where it was performed, it must be recognized in New York State.

The county has said it will appeal the decision to New York’s highest court. “I’m looking forward to our day in court and getting this issue settled statewide once and for all,” Martinez said.

The CSEA local at MCC was not involved in the lawsuit but negotiated to add domestic partner benefits to its contract after the case was filed. MCC’s Faculty Association, which is affiliated with New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), has had domestic partner benefits in its contract since 2004. (PSC members have had domestic partner benefits since the 1990s.)

VALIDATION

“This decision was a good one and certainly is a step in the right direction for marriage equality in New York State,” said Bethany Gizzi, the Faculty Association’s grievance chair. The ruling “will ensure that all MCC employees now have the right to have their marriages recognized,” Gizzi told Clarion. The effort to win full marriage equality at both State and federal levels is important, she said, because “domestic partner benefits do not provide the vast array of rights and benefits that marriage does.”

The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) labor group, Pride at Work, also expressed its support. “The Martinez decision has implications for every same-sex household in New York,” said Bess Watts, president of the Rochester Pride at Work chapter. “It means workplace equity in terms of health insurance for spouses and children, family and bereavement leave, and survivor benefits. But the subtler, equally significant impact of recognizing same-sex marriages is the validation of gay and lesbian employees as full and equal members in the workplace.”

“It is a shame that the Monroe County administration has such a myopic, provincial perspective that they would appeal this historic decision,” added Watts. On February 25, more than 200 people rallied in downtown Rochester to protest the decision to appeal.

Valentine actions for paid family leave

CUNY faculty and staff sent CUNY management a lot of cards this Valentine’s Day. The cards support the PSC’s bargaining position for paid time off to care for new or ill family members, saying, “CUNY, stop breaking our hearts! Give us time with our families!”

Union activists and their children have gathered more than four thousand postcards from members and students.

The PSC’s political action committee also sent a letter to their state legislators: “We need your help in improving the paid family leave program and in fighting for the rights and needs of working families.”

Equal recognition for LGBT workers

Monroe CC must give benefits to lesbian spouse

By CANDICE JOHNSON

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Valentine’s Day. The cards support all employers in New York, both public and private.

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By PETER HOGNESS

Contract organizing this semester has featured campus meetings with department chairs and Higher Education Officers and a high-visibility campaign for paid family leave.

Geraldine Ruiz, chair of allied health sciences at Hostos, went to a February 20 meeting at the college between department chairs and union leaders. The session was well-attended, she told Clarion, with a majority of department chairs taking part.

“We were unanimous in our feelings today,” she said. “I think everyone is prepared to take a four-hour meeting, then an other four-hour session,” she said. “We're well organized,” Ruiz said, with more than 50 HEOs at the table.

UNANIMOUS

Another topic was management’s proposal to eliminate salary steps, and replacing them with a new system. Ruiz said, “It’s very difficult for us to recruit. To take away the steps would make it much worse.”

Ruiz said that her department constantly has open lines that are difficult to fill due to low salaries. “We have openings in dental hygiene and we can’t fill them,” she said. “We had an opening in radiologic technology – it took us three years to get our first application! They want us to address the dire shortage in nursing, but we can’t increase the enrollment if we can’t get the faculty.” Eliminating the step system, she said, “would be another blow to us in terms of trying to recruit.”

Meetings with department chairs were also held at City College, Hunter and Lehman in February, and were planned for Queensborough and Medgar Evers in March.

OUTREACH

Valentine’s Day saw protest and outreach at 13 CUNY campuses on the issue of paid family leave, which CUNY currently does not offer. “It’s a Valentine’s Day for Broken Hearts!” was the slogan on postcards that faculty, staff and students were asked to sign; a total of 4,200 cards were collected. (See photos, page 5)

Still no money offer from CUNY

At CUNY, adjuncts have only limited leave for illness or emergency – generally a maximum of one or two days per semester. They cannot accumulate leave from one semester to the next – no matter how many years they have worked for CUNY. If they are dropped from the payroll, they can pay to maintain their health coverage under COBRA, but it is expensive – about $500 to $1,000 a month for an individual, $1,200 to $1,800 for a family. An underpaid adjunct who suddenly has no paycheck may find that he can’t afford it.

Klein has taught at CUNY – at the same college – for five years. She loves helping her students learn to read, she told Clarion. “One of the students who are struggling their whole lives with reading, suddenly has no paycheck and her department to have her courses assigned to her again, she said. “I’ve worked so hard and given so much to the system, but financially I’m receiving nothing back,” she said.

Afraid to take one day off for this broken arm

At the negotiating table, CUNY has still made no economic offer after more than six months of negotiations – despite settlements earlier this year between New York State and its largest employee unions.

In response, said PSC President Barbara Bowen, “We have told CUNY management we see no point in holding another formal bargaining session until they are prepared to give us an economic proposal. And we’re pressing them not just to come to us with any offer, but with a good offer.”

In the meantime, union and management representatives have held smaller side meetings on specific issues, she told the February 28 Delegate Assembly, such as family leave and equity issues. “Each individual issue may take a four-hour meeting, then another two-hour meeting, then another four-hour session,” she said. “But we are looking to make progress on outstanding issues wherever we can.”
Adjunct health care is broken among full-timers, too

“I was worried that my coverage would be discontinued if I stopped teaching,” said Nugent (who asked that Clarion not use her real name). An adjunct who has taught at two CUNY institutions since 1983, Post is in her 60s and has chronic hepatitis C, a potentially life-threatening condition that can cause cirrhosis and liver cancer.

For most of her decades at CUNY, Post had taught only two courses at one CUNY campus and one at another. In 2003, she needed chemotherapy, and as a concession to the punishing regimen she gave up one class. She needed to teach at least six credit hours a semester to continue her eligibility for health insurance (non-teaching adjuncts must work 10 hours to qualify). "I was terrified that I wouldn’t be able to work, and that I would lose my health insurance,” she said. "Treatment cost $700 a week.” So she kept on working. Post remembered that during her treatments, “I was so tired, I used to fall against the desk."

In 2005, Post repeated the whole process and again had to drop her third class. For the other two, to cover the cost of chemotherapy, she had to work five to six hours a day. Post, like the majority of anyone presenting to our students?” she asked. “That hard work, degrees and dedication will earn you no consideration? What students deserve is merit. Instead is a CUNY that provides all faculty and staff with decent health insurance, and allows them to take time off when they face a health crisis. That’s the kind of university we want.”

Walter Dufresne has taught at City Tech for 19 years.
Higher Education Assistant Amanda Plumb runs CUNY’s Union Semester program.

By DANIA RAJENDRA

CUNY’s Union L.

By DANA RAJENDRA

In 1997, Duke University sophomore Amanda Plumb spent the summer interning at the New York New York union with UNITE, the clothing and textile workers union. It was an opportunity through Duke’s internship program. Now, as a Higher Education Assistant at CUNY, she offers students interested in the labor movement an intensive program of internship and coursework called “Union Semester.”

“Social justice roadmaps” are posted all over the walls of Plumb’s office. The “roadmap” is an exercise Plumb assigned to her Union Semester students during orientation. Each plots the important points of their intellectual and emotional journey to the labor movement, and the students then discuss the maps as a way of introducing themselves to one another.

When asked about her background, Plumb plucked out her own map to show the winding journey to becoming a labor organizer, where she’s been the coordinator for nearly two years. The first stop on her map was a blueberry bush. “In high school, I was into community service. I was picking blueberries for a soup kitchen,” she said. “And I thought, there has got to be a better way to help people.”

INTERNSHIP

A later stop was her internship at UNITE, where she and fellow interns helped research and design the organizing materials that launched the union. Students Against Sweatshops. She returned to Duke, where she and fellow students won a campaign to require luxury unions in the university’s service. I was picking blueberries for a soup kitchen,” she said. “And I thought, there has got to be a better way to help people.”

“I’m taking ‘Labor and Globalization,’” said Wong. “We talk about how bigger, macro issues are shaping what’s happening in our internships.”

“Plumb brings the practical and the academic perspectives together in a weekly seminar in which “the internship is the main text.” In one class, for example, students outlined the structure of their unions, which Plumb led “into a discussion of union democracy,” she said.

Plumb uses the seminar to build community among the students, a big part of Union Semester’s success. “Interning at a union often comes with a lot of surprises for young activists,” she said. “There’s a big difference between being a student activist and being a union staff.” Plumb’s class addresses the concerns and conflicts that arise from that difference. For example, what does it mean to intern for a union that endorses a candidate for president you don’t support?

As a HEO with a wide-ranging job description, Plumb builds the Union Semester community in many other ways. She runs the orientation (“a crash course in the labor movement”), matches students to internships based on their interests; and assists students with problems on the job or in adapting to life in New York City (“Sometimes I feel like a social worker.”)

MUTUAL SUPPORT

Students say that Plumb’s work pays off. “You really feel that people here care about you,” Wong told Clarion. Graduates have written Plumb to say they miss the strong mutual support.

Like other HEOS, Plumb also does the less glamorous work that keeps the program running. The day Clarion visited her office, she was interrupted by phone calls about the production of the program’s brochures. She also involves unions, processes students’ enrollment forms and troubleshoots problems with CUNY systems (such as when Blackboard’s not working, or when a student doesn’t get her financial aid.

Union Semester is based in CUNY’s Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies. It attracts students from all over CUNY, the US and the world. The program is now accepting applications for the Fall 08 session, and CUNY students, if accepted, can take the program via the E-PeMIT system. Undergraduates who complete the program, while graduate students earn 12 and a Certificate in Labor Studies. The Murphy Institute offers a range of classes on the labor movement, Plumb noted, and CUNY students and PSC members can take them without being part of Union Semester.

NUTS AND BOLTS

About 30 unions and other labor organizations participate, usually about 15 to 20 in a given semester. Each hosts one or two students. “Our interns have a lot of responsibility,” said Plumb. “At a couple of the depots the internship is very hands on where they work consists of only one person. An intern placed there does double that department. Union summer interns do a lot more than xeroxing. Some research organizing targets, others work on lobbying in the workplace. Two unions – the taxi workers and the Writers Guild – have hosted interns while on strike,” Plumb said.

Many students extend beyond having an extra set of hands. “A lot of unions are very invested in the next generation,” Plumb observed. “Mentors enjoy helping people around who ask the bigger questions that we don’t always think about day to day, and students are intensely curious about such questions as, ‘What’s the union’s position on immigration?’ Or, ‘Can the labor movement fundamentally challenge capitalism?’”

Plumb said, “are coming in with a lot of energy and ideology.” In turn, they learn the nuts and bolts of how the labor movement works.

Many Union Semester alumni add further labor movement “stops” to their roadmaps, Plumb said, often to graduate school or in union staff jobs. One of those alumni is PSC organizer Albert Muñoz.

“Union Semester was a pure academic introduction that I had lacked as an undergraduate, because I majored in biology,” he said. Muñoz’s map led through an internship at 1199 to a job at the Hotel and Motel Trades Council, and from there to the PSC. The program changed the map of his life, in other words, too. “I met my partner Paul in Union Semester.”

More information about Union Semester is available at www.unionsemester.org.

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By PATRICK SMITH

The Welfare Fund is now offering its new John Hancock long-term care insurance plan to PSC members who already have long-term care coverage under the company’s previous plan. As a plus, many current policyholders will be able to purchase the new program without providing any medical information if they apply during the upcoming enrollment window. This offer follows the initial offer of a new policy last fall to members without Welfare Fund long-term care insurance.

ENROLLEES IN THE ORIGINAL PROGRAM

The 1,900 people enrolled in the old plan will soon be notified by mail that they can choose to transfer to the new program. They will receive a rate quote in accordance with the level of care they select. However, anyone in the original program—which still provides excellent coverage—may simply stay with it if they wish.

Members who elect to join the new program at their current benefit level or at an increased level will have the option to sign up during the upcoming special enrollment period, from mid-April to mid-May. (Exact dates will be provided in the mailing and posted on the Welfare Fund website, www.pscuny.wf.org.)

A significant special feature of the new program is a one-time opportunity for “guaranteed acceptance”—the ability to join without the need for medical evidence of insurability. During this special enrollment period, John Hancock has agreed to waive the normal requirement of proof of insurability for current enrollees who are under age 70 as of May 1, 2008, and who are full-time active employees. Those members will qualify for guaranteed acceptance. Those enrolling in the old and new programs will have their medical/nursing team of the John Hancock life insurance company, was important to many who chose to sign up.

Not surprisingly, over half of the application forms last fall were received during the final week. Enrollment sometimes involves unburdened contemplation and then a rush to get in during the window of opportunity. The sale of late enrollment caused the initial eligibility date for some to be pushed back to February.

A third of the new enrollees did not elect to enroll in the new plan as a payment method. Since experience indicates that direct billing leads to higher rates of cancellation for premium subscribers than the traditional office procedure, those members are required to pay in full. The web address and a special username and password are available on the Welfare Fund website at www.pscuny.wf.org.

The first phase of this enrollment program, which was completed in late May, was quite successful. The number of people who signed up, over 95% were able to take advantage of “guaranteed acceptance.” Many entering the new program were met by difficulties, but most were able to work through them.

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MEMBERS' STORIES

Struggling on CUNY salaries

When the PSC bargaining team invited you to tell us about the effects of CUNY’s failure to provide competitive salaries, we flooded with messages. This is a small sample. Salary increases are at the top of the PSC’s negotiating agenda, and no one explains why more eloquently than our members. There is still time to add your voice: click on the PSC website www.psc-cuny.org or e-mail stonge@pscmail.org to send us your story. (And let us know if you would prefer to remain anonymous.)

The testimony of colleagues shows that struggles with salary are not individual or departmental—they are collective. Don’t read these stories and weep, read them and organize!

Mario DiGangi
Associate professor, English
Lehman College

This morning I received a phone call from an outstanding candidate we were considering for an open position. This dynamic young scholar was from New York and received his PhD from an Ivy League institution; he indicated he felt good about his interview and the prospect of working at CUNY. However, he received an offer from a research university in the South with a two-two course load and a salary more commensurate with the cost of living. With our low salaries and three-four senior college course load, CUNY cannot compete for the best candidates.

Eric Balzer
Adjunct lecturer, paralegal studies
City Tech

I have a law degree, 25 years of legal experience and three years as a secondary school teacher with the NYC Department of Education. Last year I interviewed for a full-time position at CUNY, and I liked the staff and the program. However when I heard about the salary—almost 40% less than what I made as a high school teacher—I asked to be removed from consideration for the position. We are training students for real jobs that will add to the quality of life for our entire city. CUNY’s salary structure should recognize the critical contribution of the instructional faculty to our urban economic lifeblood.

John Harbeson
Professor, political science
City College & the Graduate Center

Whether CUNY would consider its true peers to be good liberal arts colleges because we are a system of liberal arts colleges, or a doctoral university because of the Graduate Center, CUNY is out of line on teaching loads, salaries, research support and relative technology. My colleagues at other institutions look at me in disbelief when I tell them about conditions here.

If you want to keep CUNY students, keep CUNY faculty.

Paula Gannon
Adjunct lecturer, social work
Huston Community College

From 50 to 60% of CUNY’s faculty are part-timers, many with advanced degrees, and there’s business rationale aplenty for CUNY to retain more of this deeply committed, talented labor pool. The University must build in more job security for part-time faculty, including more part-time to full-time conversion lines, and provide wages that reflect the real amount of time required for better student outcomes and graduation rates. Of the 277 students I’ve taught in the last four semesters at Hustos, 45% spoke a language other than English at home. These adult students are a worthy investment, so hardworking—58% of my students work full-time, with more than 30% juggling three or more adult roles (full-time student, parent, wage-earner or caring for infirm parents). So community college students are understandably overburdened, and terribly stressed, thus requiring more faculty time and attention— for assessment, for support services, for weekly written homework, for more after-class consultations and for more referrals to CUNY’s tutoring and counseling services.

For a conscientious pedagogue, full-time or part-time, these student realities mean additional hours worked outside of the classroom to ensure good learning outcomes. For part-time faculty, it means a vow of poverty. My adjunct colleagues calculate a 1:3 hour ratio (in-class: out-of-class student support hours) to ensure each of the 30+ students per class gets the individual attention and direction they want and deserve.

Can we expect to retain talented, valuable part-time faculty when they are so underpaid? The faculty turnover that results has its inevitable cost.

The October 2007 “Harper’s Index” listed a series of statistics that caught my eye: “ESTIMATED amount that teacher turnover costs US school districts each year in recruiting and training: $7,000,000,000. That a new public-school teacher in Philadelphia will leave within six years: seven in ten. Chances that an entering high school student will not graduate within the same span: four in ten.”

Adjunct turnover at CUNY also has a high cost, and our students pay the price in needlessly low retention and graduation rates. If you want to keep CUNY students, keep CUNY faculty.
Victoria Wallace
Higher Education Assistant, office of testing
Queensborough Community College

I am not only a CUNY employee, but an alumna as well. I have now worked in three CUNY institutions and attended one (BA and MS). I have enjoyed my time at CUNY, but it is becoming more evident that I may need to commit elsewhere.

Like many other CUNY faculty and staff, I’m a single mom, not receiving child support. You would think that the fact that I hold a master’s degree, and am an HEO that I would be able to support my child and myself, but I’m not. My father always told me that you should never spend more than one-fourth of your monthly salary on your rent or mortgage. Well, one-fourth of my take-home salary is $680 (not even enough to rent a small room in a bad neighborhood). Half of my monthly salary could afford us a decent two bedroom apartment, but then I’d have to cut out food and clothes. So what do I do? Right now, we’ve been lucky enough to have friends rent us a room in their house.

Up until May of last year, I had two jobs and worked an average of 60 hours per week. The business I worked for closed suddenly, and I decided to take some time to spend with my child. I’m now looking for another part-time job. I’m also looking at other colleges and universities that pay more. I actually may take the offer to work as a high school guidance counselor, as my pay would increase by at least $5,000 per year, thus making it possible to work only one job.

How does this affect students? Well, more and more you have excellent professors and competent staff leave, because they can no longer afford to stay. “You get what you pay for,” is too often true!

It saddens me that our city/state and chancellor do not feel as if we are worth a competitive salary. Our master’s and doctoral degrees are not worth as much as the bachelor’s and master’s degrees of kindergarten teachers. I would hate to leave CUNY, as it is dear to my heart, but my time is drawing to an end. My child means more to me than CUNY (or anything else), and I no longer want to be an absent mom.

The gap between low salaries and high housing costs has a severe negative impact.

Barbara Simerka
Associate professor, Spanish
Queens College

In many ways I am very happy to be at CUNY; teaching first-generation college students has always been my goal. I know that my life story has helped to inspire discouraged and overworked students to hang in there for another semester or to pursue graduate study.

But the gap between low CUNY salaries and high housing costs has a severe negative impact. I am not afforded the chance even modest housing in areas in NYC that offer good schools for my child and safe streets. Like most faculty hired over the past decade, I have been forced to live in a remote area and commute for an hour or more.

Amy Herzog
Assistant professor, media studies
Queens College

In 2004 I was hired as an assistant professor at Queens. I soon found that my income was barely enough to cover living expenses, given the sizable amount of debt I had built up while completing my PhD. I was hardly alone. During the past three years, three young assistant professors have left my department to take jobs elsewhere. Many faculty in my department, junior and senior, are actively seeking higher-paying positions. I find this increadibly disheartening.

Over the past three and a half years, I have worked tirelessly. I typically teach over 100 students per semester, many in writing-intensive courses, with no teaching assistants. I’ve been an active member of the community, advising the student radio station, mentoring honors students, and have acted as chair of our department’s undergraduate curriculum committee. I have spent every spare hour writing and researching, presenting lectures and conference papers, publishing articles and chapters, and I am in the process of securing a book contract at a major university press.

Yet a promotion, if granted, will offer only a minimal change in salary.

If CUNY is to sustain itself as a quality institution of higher education, it must commit itself to paying faculty a competitive salary. We are losing our best resources and eroding the foundation of the institution in the process. Our students are the real victims here, denied the support, stability and excellence that they deserve.

Every hour we spend commuting takes away from time that could be spent on preparation or research and writing. Even though CUNY salaries have increased since I first obtained my doctorate, thanks to the efforts of the PSC, the affordability gap is actually worse now than in the 1990s because housing costs have risen so drastically.

A candidate from a middle-class family can depend on support in the form of co-signatures or loans for rental deposits or even mortgage down payments, but as the size of a blue-collar worker, that aid was not available to me. CUNY surely does not want to drive away the candidates whose lives and experiences best correspond to those of our student body, nor to deprive them of role models.

Marion D.S. Dreyfus
Adjunct lecturer, continuing & professional studies
Baruch

In September of 2005, I began teaching at Baruch. I got $50 an hour, which I thought low at the time. I have experience and had just come from several years of teaching at the college level.

I get paid very, very slowly—sometimes not for six months after I have taught the classes. This past paycheck, I noticed I had been given a raise. It was 50 cents per hour. So for a month of hard work, with endless hours of prep and grading and homework assignments and a huge amount of research to do, the best I can possibly receive is $88 a month.

At the same time, my rent went up $280 a month. My food bills are 30% higher. My phone, electricity and computer bills are 25 to 30% higher. But my paycheck reflects an increase of 1% in more than two years’ work. I am desolate. I know I do a good job. I attend all practicums, all seminars and enrichment courses. I do norming on the side, where we are paid even less per hour. There is no way a person can live on this kind of income. It is unignifiable.

Students are denied the support, stability and excellence they deserve.

Rafael Rosado
Higher Education Assistant, academic counseling
Lehman College

Within the past three-and-a-half years, three academic counselors within my department have been given job opportunities. Since our office is relatively small, losing an academic advisor affects both the quality and quantity of service provided to our students. As you may know, when an academic advisor departs, he/she takes with him/herself a wealth of academic policy and curriculum knowledge which may take months to replace. As a result, students are advised, at times, by novice academic counselors who are less prepared to give them the best possible advice and information. Therefore, I would urge all university administrators to seriously consider raising salaries not only for faculty, but also for members of the non-teaching instructional staff. Raising salaries benefits not only the professional staff—it also assists the students.
A bill now before the New York City Council would require a police permit for possession of all “atmospheric, biological, chemical and radiological detectors” outside of the City’s health and fire departments. The stated purpose of the bill is to avoid “excessive false alarms and unwarranted anxiety.” But a broad array of unions, academics, environmental groups and others strongly opposed the bill at its first City Council hearing January 8.

If Intro 650 is adopted, possession of such a detector without a valid permit would incur fines of up to $2,000, imprisonment of up to 20 days, or both. The bill is written so broadly that ordinary environmental sensors, school laboratory equipment and even smoke detectors would come under police department administrative control.

“Will transferring power and control over ordinary testing equipment to government agencies help us fight terrorism or prevent false alarms that we have yet to experience?” asked David Kotelchuck, co-chair of the PSC’s health and safety committee. “Or is this a surrender of free speech and academic rights to measure and communicate environmental data among members of the public?”

Sponsored by Councilmember Peter Vallone, the bill was introduced at the request of Mayor Bloomberg and the NYPD. Richard Falkenrath, the NYPD’s deputy commissioner for counter-terrorism, told the Council that the bill had originally been suggested by the federal Department of Homeland Security.

**A STEP BACK**

At the hearing New York City Central Labor Council and the NY Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) charged that the bill “would make it more difficult for the public and governmental agencies to obtain environmental sampling data in a timely manner.” Kotelchuck testified that Intro 650 “would criminalize many activities conducted by industry, workers, academics and students.”

City Councilmember John Liu observed that if this law had been in effect on 9/11, the independent testing done by unions and community-based organizations could not legally have been conducted. “The release of this independent data arguably did incite public alarm and embarrass government officials to the benefit of the general public,” argued a critique by a group of lawyers opposed to the bill. “We feel this legislation creates more concerns than the problem it addresses,” wrote Donald Hart, president of the American Industrial Hygiene Association, in a letter to Mayor Bloomberg. “Frankly, we are not convinced there is a problem.”

Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer underscored that point at the January hearing. “I cannot think of any evidence or events from our recent past involving ‘false alarms’ that would create any urgency for such sweeping legislation,” Stringer said. Overall, testified Jack Caravano, director of environmental and occupational health sciences at Hunter College, Intro 650 would represent “a step back” from the “community right-to-know” regulations that the environmental movement has fought hard to achieve.

In response to this opposition, sponsors of the bill have revised it – but critics are still not satisfied. The bill “would criminalize many activities conducted by industry, workers, academics and students.”

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In response to this opposition, sponsors of the bill have revised it – but critics are still not satisfied. The current version, Intro 650B excludes from regulation smoke alarms and radon detectors, as well as detectors used by “accredited academic institutions...for the purpose of academic instruction.”

However, the exemptions would not specifically cover environmental or community groups, or academics working with such organizations. These groups and private consultants would have to register equipment, detail anticipated activities and demonstrate their “good character and fitness” to the NYPD. The proposed rules also state that the police commissioner may, at his or her discretion, order “surrender of possession and/or the discontinuance of deployment” of any detector, if its use would “exacerbate a condition of public alarm” during an emergency.

**SUBJECTIVE**

More broadly, the new draft 650B would exclude from regulation those detectors which do not have “as a purpose the detection of a possible biological, chemical or radiological weapons attack.” But making this distinction would not be easy, as instruments capable of detecting terrorist attacks are also used for ordinary detection of environmental contamination and occupational exposures.

“The new language requires a subjective evaluation of an individual’s motives,” warns the lawyers’ critique. “Police officers will be put in an impossible situation. Unable to interrogate every person possessing or using a detector...they will be left to pick and choose among the public, which opens the door to arbitrary or discriminatory police action.” Even with the best intentions, it adds, this is “likely to result in numerous confrontations” that would “create significant tension between the police and the public.”

The bill is still before the Council, and opponents are asking New York City residents to contact their councilmembers to register their concerns. (Full text of the bill and further information are at www.nycosh.org.)

**PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs Dave Kotelchuck (left) and Bob Wurman.**

**Unions oppose requiring permits for detectors.**