From soldier to student at CUNY

Veterans who enroll at CUNY face many kinds of obstacles in making the transition to student life. Services are improving, but it’s just a start.  

On Wednesday, May 7, fourteen City Council members joined more than 150 CUNY faculty, staff and students at a PSC press conference at City Hall. They called for reversal of the more than $14 million in CUNY budget cuts that Bloomberg proposed in his Executive Budget and for additional urgently needed funds for the University. The PSC delivered 25,000 postcards to Council members that day. “Students are streaming into the colleges to prepare for difficult economic conditions,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen, above, with CUNY students, faculty and staff. “This is no time to cut the City University.”

COMING HOME
From soldier to student at CUNY  

PAGES 6-7

RETIREMENT
TIAA-CREF’s new vehicles  

CUNY participants and retirees in TIAA-CREF can now choose from a range of new investment options. Are they right for you? Read more inside.  

PAGES 3 & 12

CUNY FUNDING
Sending the wrong message  

There is a growing public consensus that CUNY needs significant new investment. But Chancellor Goldstein’s speeches often muddy that message.  

PAGES 9

CUNY makes an economic offer

After 15 months of negotiations for a new contract, CUNY management finally put some money on the table. The PSC says it falls short.
State teacher convention sets direction

PSC resolutions win support

By PETER HOGNESS

The annual Representative Assembly of the teachers’ union affiliated with New York State United Teachers, was held April 10 to 12 in New York City, bringing together education workers and professionals from across the state.

In votes on NYSUT policy, all resolutions advanced by the PSC won support from delegates to this year’s Representative Assembly (RA). The issues included health insurance for adjuncts, inflation protection for retirees, paid parental leave, environmental sustainability, and organizing efforts against war and racism.

FIVE FRAMEWORKS

“At the convention, NYSUT leadership unveiled five frameworks to clearly communicate a more activist and progressive agenda for the union,” PSC First Vice President Steve London told Clarion. “Focusing activity on building political power, internal and external organizing, good communication of messages, a social justice agenda, and ongoing education, the convention signaled NYSUT’s movement toward embracing the principles of social unionism.”

RA delegates unanimously adopted a resolution establishing a forum for high-quality, health insurance for part-time faculty and staff as a NYSUT priority. The resolution called it “offensive...that public universities rely on part-time, contingent and graduate employees to carry much of the teaching load and keep the institution afloat — and then fail to offer these same employees the basic human provision of health insurance.”

The RA pledged NYSUT’s support for both legislative and collective bargaining campaigns to ensure that New York universities provide high-quality, paid health insurance for part-time faculty and staff. The PSC has made this a key issue its current contract negotiations, demanding that CUNY provide paid health insurance coverage for its graduate employees and bring adjunct faculty and staff onto the regular City health plan.

The PSC has been pushing hard for a system of paid family leave at CUNY, and RA delegates approved a resolution in support of paid parental leave as a national social benefit. It noted that “the US is one of only five countries out of 175 surveyed worldwide that does not provide any federal entitlement to paid maternity leave, and that the lack of paid leave is particularly damaging to women’s income and care. Failure to provide paid family leave harms women and men as well, it added.

The PSC-sponsored resolution, adopted unanimously, urged the two national teacher unions with which NYSUT is affiliated, the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association, to both work for federal legislation that would guarantee “universal paid parental leave.”

Last year saw a victory for equity in pension contributions, with the State Legislature voting to give part-time and part-year employees the same rights as full-time employees, with the exception of of those in defined-benefit plans such as the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS). Originally advanced by the PSC, this reform won strong and persistent support from NYSUT and was finally enacted last fall. (See September 2007 Clarion, at www.psc-cuny.org/communications for details.)

This year’s RA approved a call, from the PSC and other locals, to support inflation protection for participants in the ORP. The goal is to ensure income protection comparable to the Cost-Of-Living Adjustment currently provided to participants in TRS.

Also adopted were two PSC resolutions on war and peace. One voiced strong opposition to the Bush administration’s moves toward war with Iran. It condemned “the reaction of the Ahmadinejad regime” his shameful, anti-Semitic Holocaust denials, as well as that government’s attacks on Iranian workers and unions. But it warned that Bush’s threats of military action only strengthen that regime, and that war with Iran “would lead to devastating loss of life...a further drain on the education and health budgets in the US, and catastrophic consequences for the region and the world.

The other PSC proposal stated NYSUT’s opposition to Bush’s “policy of permanent and ‘preemptive’ war.” Linking the US government’s current militarism to attacks on civil liberties and international law, it urged closing of the Guantanamo prison and an end to torture and “rendition,” as well as immediately beginning a complete withdrawal of US armed forces from Iraq. NYSUT’s resolution was adopted after the PSC reported that “appliance broke out in the audience” when this resolution was approved.

“This resolution marks a profound shift in NYSUT policy,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “It registers opposition not just to the practice of the current war, but to the theory of ‘preemptive’ war that lies behind it.” Over the last few years, Bowen said, NYSUT has evolved toward a clear cut-anti-war position, and the PSC has played an important role in that change.

PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant at the NYSUT Representative Assembly.

CORPORATE CASH vs. ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Corporate cash vs. academic freedom

Next issue

More on the CUNY Law School, and the end of the adjunct labor series.

By LEONARD RODBERG

Why should there be any credit-bearing “sponsored courses”? In addition, it is asserted that an unenrolled faculty member was indoctrinated into teaching the course. Finally, Hunter was paid $10,000 in return for offering the course. If verified, these allegations reveal a series of entirely improper proceedings. As CUNY becomes more reliant on private sources of funding, are we to be relegated to “playing the game” the world?

Lenore Beaky

Vice Chair, University Faculty Senate

National health care a must

The horrifying experiences of our adjuncts, when they fall ill or need surgery (March Clarion), as a consequence of the inadequate health coverage they receive from CUNY, is further stark evidence of the failings of this country’s health insurance system.

For years, PSC/CUNY, like unions across the country, has been faced with rising costs and declining access. The lesson is that only a national health insurance program, such as that embodied in the Conyers-Kucinich Bill, HR 876, and supported by our union, can effectively rein in costs while providing coverage for everyone, no matter where or when we work.

Leonard Rodberg

Queens College

MEMBER OF THE YEAR

Bob Cermelle, chair of the PSC chapter at City Tech and the union’s Vice President for Senior Colleges, was named as one of NYSUT’s two Higher Education Members of the Year. “Bob Cermelle embodies all the qualities of an education union leader – professionalism, advocacy and compassion,” said NYSUT President Richard C. Ianuzzi on the presentation of the award.

Cermelle is a veteran of many lobbying trips to argue the union’s case in Albany, and NYSUT Executive Vice President Alan Lubin called him an effective advocate. “When he speaks to legislators, they listen to his voice of experience about the needs of his students and the CUNY system,” Lubin said.

Cermelle said it meant a lot to him to be honored by the union and the people he works with. “To me,” he said, “recognition by one’s comrades is the highest acclaim.”

UFT President Randi Weingarten chose the RA as the time and place to announce her candidacy for president of the AFT, which will choose a new top executive at its convention this summer. RA delegates voted overwhelmingly to support her candidacy.

The RA also heard from AFT-endorsed presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, speaking to delegates in the convention hall via a live telephone link from the campaign trail.
CUNY makes money offer
Concessions still on the table

By PETER RIGNESS

More than a year after negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement first began, CUNY management presented an economic offer on May 12. The chancellor’s negotiators proposed increases of 3.15%, 3% and 3% over a 37-month agreement, plus 2% for other economic needs. The proposal would also boost employer contributions to the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund by $50 per capita.

The last PSC-CUNY contract expired on September 19 of last year. The PSC called for talks on a new agreement, but CUNY management indicated that if negotiations began several months earlier, on February 7, 2007. The financial offer came after the PSC organized campus protests in April that criticized management’s long delay in starting discussions on an economic package (see below, also April Clarion). Most municipal unions reached settlements with New York City last year, and the largest State worker unions followed suit between October and December. CUNY negotiators were accompanied by NYC’s labor commissioner at the May 12 session.

FALLS SHORT

The PSC bargaining team greeted management’s proposal as “a serious offer,” but said it still falls far short of the increase that CUNY needs. Barbara Bowen, the PSC’s president and chief negotiator, said that uncompetitive salaries at CUNY have caused a crisis in recruitment and retention, which management’s offer will not solve. “Increases near the level of inflation will not begin to close the 20% salary gap separating CUNY and other comparable public universities,” Bowen said. (See page 12.)

Management’s money offer “represents the beginning of the economic discussion,” not the final word, Bowen emphasized. That discussion became intense in the wake of the May 12 bargaining session, which was followed by a flurry of side meetings and technical discussions. “We are prepared to work around the clock to reach a settlement,” Bowen said on behalf of the union team. In discussing how the 2% for other economic needs would be used, management negotiators advocated for what they called “performance pay” – a plan the union said would not help to solve CUNY’s salary crisis. “One-time awards of money, not added to base pay and given at the discretion of the college president, are not substitute for true salary increases,” Bowen said. “We need real money and not fake ones.” (See also page 11.)

In the May 12 bargaining session, management indicated some openness to other union demands. PSC negotiators pressed their case for paid family leave, job security and health insurance for part-time employees, and boosting the top salary step in every title and rank.

CONCESSIONS

There was no discussion of a range of concessions demanded by management in past negotiating sessions, which have been sharply criticized by the union. These in wide ranging: taking state jobs, taking faculty away, and slashing job security for Higher Education Officer-series employees.

In a public meeting at Brooklyn College in March, Chancellor Goldstein said that if faculty opinion was strongly against the idea, he was prepared to abandon the demand to exclude department chairs from the bargaining table. However, this demand – and the others – have yet to be withdrawn by the chancellor’s representatives in negotiations.

By DANIA RAJENDRA

“New York needs CUNY, and CUNY needs a raise.” That was the message of a PSC television ad that ran on cable and local broadcast TV during April. And just in case CUNY Trustees didn’t see it, union members brought that message to a protest at the Board’s April 28 meeting.

Members picketed in the rain outside the main building at Baruch, expressing their frustration over 15 months of negotiations without an economic offer. Later the protest moved inside to the Trustees’ meeting on the 14th floor. In the conference room, activists stood silently with signs that showed the rise in the cost of consumer goods – like gas, milk, and average rents – while CUNY employees salaries have fallen behind.

When Clarion asked Aisha Peña, a library faculty member at Baruch, why she had come to the picket, her response couldn’t have been clearer: “Rises! Raises! Raises!”

Mabel Rodriguez-Cuesta, an adjunct lecturer in Baruch’s modern language department, agreed. “Everything is very expensive,” she said. “We are getting paid less than our peers.”

DO THE MATH

The picketers handed out flyers that asked CUNY Trustees to “Do the math,” and featured math problems such as this: “Pay for IHE As- sistant has lost 41% of its earning power since 1971. If they had re- ceived the same percentage salary increases as Chancellor Goldstein since 1994 – 56% – how much closer would they be today to recovering this earning power?” (The answer: “They would have recovered 86.5% of the loss.”)

The flyer was “Assignment overdue,” with an original due date of September 19, 2007 – the day the last PSC-CUNY contract expired.

Inside, members of the PSC bargaining team sat in the front row of chairs at the Board of Trustees meeting, to symbolize that the union was still waiting for an economic offer, 15 months after bargaining for a new agreement began. They held signs that said, “CUNY needs a raise!” while members chanted the same slogan out- side. One effect of the protest was that union members would help win a fair agreement.

On TV, on campus, at the Board

Sending the message loud and clear to the Board of Trustees.

Baruch, expressing their frustration at the Board of Trustees meeting, to symbolize that the union was still waiting for an economic offer, 15 months after bargaining for a new agreement began. They held signs that said, “CUNY needs a raise!” while members chanted the same slogan outside. One effect of the protest was that union members would help win a fair agreement.

The union’s TV advertisement aired during morning news shows on local broadcast channels, as well as NY1 and CNN on cable. A lively animation shows CUNY salaries as uncompetitive with neighboring public institutions. University of Connecticut, Rutgers University and University of Delaware, with pay at CUNY 20% below these uni- versities. The ad, “Increases run in Albany, can be viewed on the PSC website, at www.psc-cuny.org. (See also page 11.)

Local campus organizing also focused on the need for CUNY-wide salary increases. At Brooklyn Col- lege, the chapter invited elected of- ficials to a hearing about the effects of CUNY’s low salaries and other substandard learning conditions. Faculty and staff told Senate-Senator Kevin Parker and Assemblymem- ber Rhoda Jacobs about the grow- ing crisis in recruitment and retention.

“One needs to live on the miser- able deal we offer at CUNY,” BC Professor Nancy Roman told Parker and Jacobs in her testimony. “They know they will have abbreviated re- search careers, never be able to buy a house, and have a very hard time having children.”

More than 40 union members attended. Those who testi- fied included part-time and full-time, junior and senior faculty, as well as staff, said Chapter Chair Tibbi Dubyos.

“It is very difficult to re- cruit and retain highly qualified job candidates,” noted BC English department Chair James Davis. In his own de- partment, he said, there has been “an especially chilling effect on the recruitment and retention of highly qualified people of color, many of whom seem genuinely to like the idea of teaching in Brook- lyn and to admire CUNY’s mission but who...receive offers from other institutions that far exceed what we offer them in both finan- cial and non-financial terms.”

Both Parker and Jacobs said that much of the testimony was shock- ing, and that they had not heard these concerns raised by CUNY ad- ministration. The two legislators encouraged PSC members to con- tinue to raise the issues with the en- tire Brooklyn Senate and Assembly delegation.

“It’s very troubling,” Parker told Clarion. “All of this goes directly to the quality of education students are receiving.” In addition to uncom- petititive pay, Parker said CUNY needs to deal with its outsized teaching load, which limits student-faculty interaction. “Greater availability of professors makes [students] more productive in their own learning,” Parker said. More funds for CUNY’s physical plant are needed for “opti- mal teaching conditions,” Parker said, “and they should go to making the buildings healthy for faculty, stu- dents and staff.”

ON CAMPUSS

In other campus organizing, the BMCC chapter circulated a petition among all members in support of the union’s demands for adjuncts, including a Certifi- cate of Continuing Employment (CCE) to provide a measure of job security for adjuncts who have received multiple appoint- ments and successful evaluations.

The union is asking members on other cam- puses to sign – and you can do so online, at www.psc-cuny.org/APpe- tition/PTpetition.htm.

“You need not be an ad- junct to sign!” emphasized PSC Vice President for Part-Time Pers- onnel Marcia Newfeld, herself an adjunct at BMCC.

Greater continuity for experi- enced adjunct faculty would help students and their families, and union activists say. To support the union’s negotiators as they make this case at the bargaining table, the petition is asking adjuncts to send in their own accounts of how lack of job security has hurt them, their de- partments and their students. (E- mail your story to Newfield at mnewfeld@pscmail.org.)

“Students often ask adjuncts when they can expect to have a larger raise, when the next semester, when we teach most of the intro classes at CUNY,” Newfeld said. “It’s bad for them, and bad for us, to have to tell them that we have no idea.”
An April 30 incident at City College brought home to CUNY the fear of violence on campus.

That afternoon, CCNY student Kirk Hanley showed another student a gun and told her there would be a shooting. Hanley, according to Mary Lou Edmondson, City College vice president for communications, the female student excused herself and walked into the financial aid office, where she reported what had happened. Hanley followed her to financial aid and sat down in the waiting area.

Silvester Mendoza, a 23-year-old senior, told Clarion he was sitting in the finance department when Hanley approached him and showed him a gun. Hanley grabbed a nearby student by her hair and put the gun next to her head, Mendoza said. Moments later, two NYPD officers arrived, one of whom drew his gun. Mendoza remembers Hanley repeatedly asking, "Are you guys going to shoot me like Sean Bell?"

CUNY policy.

The problems facing CUNY counselors are part of a national trend. According to a 2007 survey by the American College Counseling Association, counselors are part of a national trend. According to a 2007 survey by the American College Counseling Association, counselors are part of a national trend.

The April 30 incident at CCNY (see above) was more extreme than most CUNY faculty or staff will ever face. (It was also more clear-cut. More common is the problem of assessing whether or not a student who is distraught may endanger themselves or others.

A CUNY graduate student who works in an office at Hunter College told Clarion she faced this type of problem at the end of the Fall 2007 semester. An undergraduate she supervised returned to the office after missing a number of days of work and told her he was depressed and upset and felt like shooting everybody. She said she knew he had problems at home, but that he was a conscientious student for poor school and work attendance.

At first, the graduate student was unsure how to respond. "People say things like that," she remembers thinking, "but they don't really mean it." But after consideration, she told her supervisor about the conversation, and the student in question was met by security personnel the next time he arrived at work. "I'd rather say something and have nothing happen, than not say something and something does happen," she explained.

VIGILANCE

Since the shootings last year at Virginia Tech and last February at Northern Illinois University, college faculty and staff have become more vigilant and alert to suspicious things they might have ignored in the past. Protecting the safety of all students, faculty and staff may sometimes require excluding a troubled student from campus. But responses that emphasize security alone may only compound the problem.

For example, in 2004 a Hunter student who lived in the dorms on the college's Brookdale campus attempted suicide. When she was discharged from the hospital, she returned to the dorm - only to find that the locks on her room had been changed. "She was allowed to pack up her belongings only under the surveillance of a security guard," reported Inside Higher Ed, and she was escorted off campus. She later sued the college, arguing that Hunter had violated the Fair Housing Act, the American with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, and won a $855,000 settlement.

"It doesn’t make sense to throw out a student who said they’re contemplating suicide," said Carl Kirschner, CUNY’s assistant dean of student affairs. "You’re taking away their only support system." As an alternative to disciplinary action, there is now a new policy - CUNY’s Medical Withdrawal and Re-Entry Policy and Procedure, which took effect July 1, 2007. It gives students whose behavior is a threat to themselves or others, or substantially disrupts the learning or working environment, the option of voluntary withdrawal.

Disciplinary procedures are no longer considered for students who threaten or attempt suicide, and students who withdraw under the new policy can undergo psychological assessment and apply for re-entry. To decide on a student’s voluntary withdrawal, CUNY now brings together a Health Review Committee made up of mental health professionals.

Kirschner said that the administration is looking for creative ways to deal with the growing demand for more psychological interventions, including increasing faculty involvement. "We want faculty and staff to be able to recognize a student in psychological distress," he said, adding "If staff and faculty can do that…we can pick up on these problems a lot earlier."

CUNY’s badly overstretched psychological counseling services (see page 5 in this issue; also see the April Clarion).

Director of counseling at Lehman.

Directions for handling unstable students. Counseling centers and departments at various colleges have taken steps to reach out to other faculty and staff, but there is currently no University-wide strategy. And at best, there is a wide range of awareness among faculty and staff about CUNY policy.
Union vs. Bloomberg’s cuts

By JOHN TARLETON

More than 150 CUNY faculty, staff and students gathered on the steps of City Hall on May 7, calling on Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the City Council to restore funding for $44 million in proposed budget cuts. The PSC delivered 25,000 postcards to City Hall showing public support for the union’s budget message and demanding new funds for City University.

“Enrollment at CUNY is higher than it has been in 35 years, and students are streaming into the colleges to prepare for difficult economic conditions,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “This is no time to cut the City University.” Bowen told reporters that Bloomberg’s proposed $28.3 million cut to CUNY’s operating budget should be reversed, as should the proposed $13.7 million reduction in student aid. She also warned that the City “is throwing away millions of dollars in State capital funds by not matching the capital funding for CUNY.”

“Just as when Wall Street is hemorrhaging, we have to diversify,” said Tish James, one of 14 City Council members who attended the press conference. “To invest in human capital, she said, “is absolutely critical...So we have to invest in CUNY.”

ED O’L, director of the NYC Central Labor Council, called CUNY “the University of the working class and the working middle class of this city,” and demanded that the budget cuts be overturned. “It’s the responsibility of elected leaders to find the money,” he said.

“What are we doing when we’re shutting the door to CUNY?” asked Councilmember Miguel Martinez. “I see lots of students coming to City Hall to send a message?” Martinez and other members pledged to fight for the restorations.

“I will do everything in my power as head of the Finance Committee,” said Councilmember David Weprin, “to see that these unfair cuts are restored fully.”

“CUNY students are hard-working people with very modest means,” said Donna Gill, a member of the PSC Executive Council who works in Hunter’s financial aid office. “They work incredibly hard, juggling school, work and family obligations. Reductions in financial aid have ‘real consequences for real students and if it’s devastating,” said Gill.

Bloomberg’s reductions would slash $11.2 million from the Vallone Scholarships, which provide tuition assistance to CUNY students who maintain a B average. “That may very well stop some of our best and brightest, who might be not be able to afford a college education, from getting in,” said PSC President John Jay College and the CUNY School of Law. “As a person who works full time,” Bradshaw said, “I am not able to afford an NYU or Columbia or Fordham education. But I’m very proud to be at CUNY.”

“CUNY students are hard-working people with very modest means,” said Donna Gill, a member of the PSC Executive Council who works in Hunter’s financial aid office. “They work incredibly hard, juggling school, work and family obligations. Reductions in financial aid have ‘real consequences for real students and if it’s devastating,” said Gill.

The IELI faculty room is not luxurious; it’s particularly precious. IELI faculty say that having on-campus support for a faculty member who works full time, said Bradshaw, “is a better teacher.”

Students and union members canvassed their campuses and communities with the postcards for several weeks, asking for public support. Hostos Community College turned in the most cards – 3,000 – while City Tech, BMCC and Brooklyn College followed with 2,900, 1,300 and 1,800 signed cards respectively.

“You must make your voices heard,” said Bowen, who is president of the PSC. “If you want to save CUNY, if you want to save the University of the working class and the middle class of this city, it’s your responsibility to fight for the restorations.”

“Members of the College Senate know how important CUNY is to them,” she said, adding that the council will not be “stomached by any more faculty cuts than those already presented.” Bowen told the Clarion that the postcard drive was such a success on her campus because faculty and students were actively involved. Cards were available through the student government association, student government association and the student government association offices. Students also took cards home to be signed by family and community members.

“We are calling on you, to your parents, to your bodega, to your lover – and then bring them back,” she explained. “It was great to see students returning with their contributions.”

Colón said one student, Nilton Gonzalez, single-handedly turned in 400 cards. Other star organizers included faculty in mathematics and dental hygiene, said Colón.

SPEAKERS at the rally also blasted Bloomberg’s shortchanging of CUNY’s capital budget. “It’s outrageous and it is unacceptable that the mayor would release an executive budget which does not include the funds needed to rebuild Fiterman Hall,” said Councilmember Alan Gerson. A BMCC classroom building, Fiterman was damaged beyond repair in the 9/11 attacks. Construction to replace it faces a funding cliff when State contributions to CUNY’s capital plan end.

“We cannot allow the City to leave money on the table,” Bowen said, “when the money is there from the State and all the City needs to do is match it.”

The PSC protest was the top story on Crain’s New York Business website. It was also featured in a range of online media across the city, including WNYC’s “Morning Edition,” community papers like the Queens Times-Ledger and the Chi-

IELI faculty petition to retain space

By DANA RAJENDRA

Space crunch squeezes facility

“Don’t take away our only space!” They presented it to Hunter administration on April 14, less than two weeks after they got the news.

APPROPRATING THEIR SPACE

Appropriating their space, the petition said, “would prevent a collegial, supportive and innovative facility from functioning productively,” and would “strike at the faculty’s ongoing ability to collaborate on behalf of our students, share best practices...and mentor and support each other.”

IELI teachers who didn’t have class on April 16 gathered that day to deliver the petition to Hunter President Jennifer Raab, IELI Director Al- ison Rice, and Lorraine Gallucci, Hunter’s director of Continuing Education and Special Programs. “People were energized after the petitions were presented,” said Yvonne Groseil, a leader among IELI faculty.

IELI’s Micro B.S. in Community Health program got off the ground in 2002. “Then we started expanding,” said Co-chair Maria del Carmen Arroyo, who teaches in Hunter’s Hunter College.

“I’ve taught here since 1984 – for 24 years,” said James Willimetz.

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Lizette Colón, newly elected as PSC chapter chair at Hostos, told the rally “This is the worst crisis we’ve ever faced.”

The faculty room houses decares worth of files and serves as a common space for the teachers, who teach all day but often have big gaps in their schedules. Hunter administration says they could still use the room when no class is in session – but IELI faculty say that having only the “left-over” time is inadequate.

“Some of us would have to get hour after hour early just to check our mailboxes, because once there’s a class in session, we wouldn’t be allowed access,” said Sarah Shively, a teacher who joined the group presenting the petition.

“Two teachers have identical offices,” Bowen told the Envyo, Hunter’s student newspaper, that such connections with colleagues has helped her “to be a better teacher.”

“Collegiality is so important,” Groseil emphasized. “And for part-timers who lack job security and tend to have irregular schedules, it’s particularly precious. IELI faculty member Gretchen Irwin Harada told the Envyo, Hunter’s student newspaper, that such connections with colleagues have helped her “to be a better teacher.”

Groseil, Hunter chapter leader Mike Perna and PSC Vice President for Part-Time Personnel Marcia Newfield are working with the IELI faculty to keep the pressure on. Groseil said that at a May meeting with the Hunter administration, “the IELI faculty presented a very positive idea to reconfigure departmental space and support collegiality, as the only space available for classes, as well as a dedicated Faculty Room. We hope that the college will agree to retain the faculty room for solving two very important problems: the need for classroom space and the need for providing support for a hard-working, highly productive faculty.”
On May 2, a Cal State teacher was fired from her job after refusing to sign a loyalty oath to “defend” the US and California constitutions against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Wendy Gonaver, who is a Quaker from Pennsylvania, considered enemies, foreign and domestic. California constitution was against the law. Fullerton rejected it, saying her administration to veterans. Those seeking union representation voted “yes” by an overwhelming majority of three to one. The 23-campus Cal State system has taken a hard line, firing at least two instructors prior to Gonaver. Efforts to remove the oath from California’s constitution have so far been unsuccessful.

Henry Ford adjuncts vote for union

On May 7, part-time adjunct faculty at Henry Ford Community College in Dearborn, Michigan voted to join the American Federation of Teachers. Those seeking union representation voted “yes” by an overwhelming majority of three to one. The 23-campus Cal State system has taken a hard line, firing at least two instructors prior to Gonaver. Efforts to remove the oath from California’s constitution have so far been unsuccessful.

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ADJUSTING TO HOME

Beyond the practical issues of benefits and credits, veterans also face more personal challenges in adjusting to student life. Many describe their nervous system is still wired to expect sniper fire, to expect a roadside bomb.

“Expecting to student life. Many describe the connection between veteran and civilian life,” Farrell said. “Veterans can be a challenge. At a small forum for vets held at Baruch last December, students in attendance realized that not one of them knew another veteran at the school. Yet that kind of connection can be vital to their success in college. The best person to engage and bring out a veteran is another veteran,” said Roger Sherwood, associate professor at Hunter’s School of Social Work and director of the Project for Return & Opportunity in Veterans’ Education (PROVID).

Certainly that was true for Joe Bello. Back in 1995, Bello had just mustered out of the Navy. “I never envisioned going to school,” he said. “My first thought was, 'I got to look for work.’” But after he enrolled at the Upward Bound program at LaGuardia, Bello said, “I met some vets who were older than me, and a little wiser than me, and they started helping me out. ‘Through Upward Bound he set his sights on college, and went on to earn a degree at NYU. Today Upward Bound is again offered at LaGuardia, under Bello’s direction.

OPPORTUNITY

With the right kind of support, said Sherwood, college can provide returning veterans with a unique opportunity. “School is a very positive transition point,” he explained. “If we can join them in that transition, we can also begin to lend them support in dealing with any kind of residual war experience.”

Veterans’ advocates at CUNY agree that providing this kind of support will require more resources. “We have a chance to get ahead of the curve and establish programs here that will serve for the rest of the country and get money flowing from the federal government,” argued Glenn Peterson. But right now, he said, “There’s so little available that it’s fighting for scraps.”

“I think CUNY has been stumbling slowly in the right direction,” he concluded. But to get the job done, the University “has to put more money where its mouth is.”

ADJUSTING TO HOME

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Aramark on strike

Every day, the strong, rhythmic chants of the striking UNITE HERE Local 100 members reach the PSC office, at the very 15th floor of the building across the street from the picket line. Thirty-five UNITE HERE workers, who staff the Bank of New York cafeteria run by the huge foodservice company Aramark, have been on strike since early March.

Their contract expired on February 29. The workers make $500 per week on average and are fighting for an hourly wage increase, better pension and medical benefits, and card check neutrality for workers at other Aramark locations who wish to organize.

Strikers are keeping up morale, they told Clarion. “We’re going to stick together and keep taking action,” said member Rose Lynn.

Striking UNITE HERE members picket at Broadway & Rector, Monday to Thursday mornings and early afternoons. PSC members can stop by to offer support or join the chant: “Aramark, you didn’t listen! Now you have an empty kitchen!”

PBA arbitration

The New York police officers’ union, the Police Benevolent Association (PBA) won a 9.7% raise over three years for local union members.

On May 19, the panel also significantly increased officers’ starting salaries for the first time.

McDaniel, an associate professor of biology, said that key issues at BCC include health and safety, teaching load, and paid family leave. Building alliances with students, other unions and community groups will be high on the chapter’s agenda, McDaniel said.

Albert Sherman, new chair of the College Lab Technicians’ chapter, has worked at CCNY for more than two decades. “I have been involved at CCNY for all of my working years,” said Sherman, a senior CLT who works in the graphic arts program at City Tech. “I love what I do, and I’m very happy to become the new chairperson.” A primary concern for Sherman will be ensuring good communication within the chapter. “What we want to make sure everyone’s on the same page,” he told Clarion.

New John Jay Chapter Chair Carl Persinger is addressing the problem of child care on campus. “We have a lot of younger faculty,” he noted, “and we need to continue the conversations with the administration and try to find ways to address that need.”

PSC chapter elections in April have brought the college one step closer to lo- cal leadership; half of those elected as chapter chair will serve in that office for the first time. But 10 of the 12 races were uncontested, and only at City College did two slates face off against each other.

Half of PSC’s chapters held elections for local leadership this year. The other half voted last year, and next year an election will be held for union-wide positions. Both local and union-wide officers serve three-year terms.

“I’m excited about the upcoming term,” said Nikki McDaniel, newly elected chapter chair at Bronx Community College. “We’ve already set a number of goals that we wish to work toward.”

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Chapter elections complete

Many new leaders take office

African unions act against repression

On April 18, the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU) refused to unload weapons from a Chinese ship docked on the City of New York contest. The weapons would be used against felons, but 10 of the 12 races were uncontested, and only at City College did two slates face off against each other.

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The weapons had been purchased by the Zimbabwean government, headed by President Robert Mugabe. SATAWU members refused to unload the cargo because they were concerned the weapons would be used against pro-democracy fel- low union members. The Zimbabwean union movement generally supports Mugabe, the opposition candidate.

Throughout southern Africa, longshore workers’ job actions meant to disrupt cargo unloading were not enough of a load. The ship, with the arms still aboard, was sent to Angola, where union dock workers unloaded only the building materials but refused to handle the munitions.
New TIAA-CREF fund options

By CLARISSA GILBERT WEISS
PSC Director of Pension & Welfare Benefits

CUNY has approved the introduction of 37 additional investment vehicles for employees and retirees who have TIAA-CREF either as their retirement program or as their Salary Reduction Agreement (SRA). The change was effective April 1, 2008.

Participants and retirees can select from a wide range of “TIAA Access Annuities.” You may have already been contacted by TIAA-CREF’s campus consultants as they roll out information about the new choices. These consultants can provide you with fund-specific allocation information.

Another way to get more information will be a customized website that TIAA-CREF will soon complete, available only to CUNY participants and retirees. The site will include information on plan eligibility, enrollment, contributions and investment choices and will have tools and calculators for retirement planning.

For the new site’s web address, and more information on when it will go live, ask your campus human resources office or TIAA-CREF campus consultant. Notices will also be sent to instructional staff.

RISK

Many of these new individual funds have heightened risk, and several are far more volatile than the original investment vehicles previously available to participants and retirees.

The PSC strongly urges members to read carefully the various prospectuses and especially past performance indicators and to meet with the campus TIAA-CREF counselors and their own personal financial advisors before making any decisions.

For the first time, TIAA-CREF is now offering investment options outside of its own family of funds. These are limited to a small group of funds from Vanguard, American Funds, T. Rowe Price and Western Asset Management. With low fees structures similar to TIAA-CREF’s own funds, they will be managed through TIAA-CREF for its participants.

Of the 37 new funds, seven are “lifecycle” funds. Lifecycle funds are a mix of fixed, equity and money market funds, in the proportion of each type of investment targeted to a participant’s age and retirement date. The participant picks an estimated retirement date, and TIAA-CREF automatically invests the money in what they feel is a correct mix. This mix will change over time, with more assets put into investments with highly predictable returns as the estimated retirement date gets closer. Participants can invest as little or as much as they wish, and can increase the amount or stop it whenever they choose. They can also change the retirement target date at any time.

A lifecycle fund will now be the default for individuals who do not choose any specific investment option at the time they join TIAA-CREF. Previously the default option was TIAA-CREF’s money market fund. Participants can change from this default option at any time.

Adjunct fund needs new support

By CLARION STAFF

As part of the last contract settlement with CUNY, the PSC received $500,000 to develop a grant program to support professional development work by eligible adjuncts and continuing as a teacher.

At the time, the PSC negotiators knew it would be very successful and urged CUNY to make this an ongoing fund. However, CUNY said the University needed proof that there would be a clear need for continuing funds. That proof is now well in hand.

From April 2007 to July 2007, the Adjunct Professional Development Fund awarded $198,820 in grants. Since September 2007 the fund awarded another $280,180 in further grants, for a total of approximately $479,000. During this 14-month period, the fund received more than 380 applications and approved 279 grants.

SUSPENSION

The Adjunct Professional Development Fund is administered by a four-person committee appointed by the PSC president, which meets monthly to approve applications.

At its last meeting, the committee decided to suspend temporarily acceptance of new applications until such time as the University agrees to the PSC demand to continue support for the fund. (Funds still on hand may be needed to support grants already approved. Through all proposed spending under a grant application must be approved in advance, the exact cost of some items may not be known until after the work is done.)

“The union urges adjuncts and continuing education teachers to help us tell the University how this fund has assisted them in their research, creative projects, and in attending classes and conferences,” said committee member Norah Chase. “The strong demand for grants from the fund and the work the fund has supported testifies to the scholarly talent among CUNY’s part-time faculty.”

Chase asked adjuncts and continuing education teachers who have received grants from the fund to e-mail accounts of their work and the difference that support from the fund has made. (Send them to Clarissa Gilbert Weiss, the fund administrator, at cweliss@pscmail.org.)

New choices called “Access Annuities”

New TIAA-CREF fund options

If you worked on or near the World Trade Center ruins, it is important that you register no later than August 13, 2008, with the New York State Workers’ Compensation Board. By registering, you will preserve your right to file a workers’ compensation claim, in case you get sick in the future.

Last summer, the Workers’ Compensation Law was changed to allow those who worked in the World Trade Center vicinity to file a claim for workers’ compensation if they have or will develop a 9/11-related illness. But to do so, rescue, recovery and cleanup workers and volunteers—including BMCC faculty and staff—must register with the Workers’ Compensation Board no later than August 13, 2008. However, to date, only about 46,000 people of the over 100,000 who qualify have registered.

EXPOSURE

People who were exposed to toxic dust or psychological trauma while working in the area after 9/11 should protect their right to file a claim. The exact definition of recovery and cleanup work is left open; registering now may protect your right in the future.

The law applies to those who worked in lower Manhattan south of Canal or Pike Streets, between Sept. 11, 2001 and Sept. 12, 2002. For detailed information, visit the NY-COSH website at www.nycoosh.org, or call the toll-free, 24-hour hotline, (866) WTC-2556. Find out about registration requirements now, before it’s too late.

New TIAA-CREF fund options
Reading, writing and rubber: Journal Club

By DANA RA JENDRA

Last Fall Jeff Bird, assistant professor of biogeochemistry in the School of Earth and Environmental Science at Queens College and the Graduate Center, offered a new course to graduate students in his program: “Journal Club.”

The formal name of the class is Current Topics in Biogeochemistry, and Bird talked with Clarion about the thinking that lay behind it.

“As a department, we decided to start prioritizing seminar-style classes for our PhD and master’s students,” he said. “This is fairly common at most R-1 universities [referring to top-tier universities],” he said and is not a novel idea at CUNY. But the emphasis is an important one, and it led Bird to reflect on his own graduate education.

BUILD COMMUNITY

As a PhD student at the University of California at Davis, he said, “I had the benefit of being in a large lab that had weekly meetings.” As a post-doc, “We’d get together over beers and read a paper once a week. What we did is incorporate those ideas into something more formal and provide some assistance in developing those skills.”

“If a department is big enough,” Bird noted, “a lot of things can happen more casually.” But in a smaller program such as his, he saw the need to be deliberate in offering students “additional coursework on some of their scholarship and research-related skills.”

The journal club class required each of the 10 enrolled graduate students to present on a scientific paper published in a peer-reviewed journal. It also helped build their scholarship and research-related coursework on some of their research during his post-doc, he added. “Building those collegial relationships is important – they can last for a career.”

In the course of the semester, Bird said, students learned that “just because a paper has been published in a peer-reviewed journal does not automatically make it a good paper.” They developed a rubric for analyzing journal articles, which Bird said was “a nice way for students to articulate what they had learned through the semester.”

SHARPEN SKILLS

The class also developed students’ skills in leading a discussion, including how to ask questions in a way that encourages further participation. It was so successful on that score that Bird incorporated elements of the journal club into the undergraduate class he taught this past Spring, Chemistry of the Global Environment.

Participation in the journal club class by his colleagues was invaluable, Bird said. He invited other members of the department to stop by for the seminar, and he was pleased that several did: “We had three or four faculty members who regularly attended.”

“It’s a good thing for graduate students to have discussions and interactions in a more informal way,” Bird told Clarion. “It encourages collegiality. Students learn that ‘student hat’ and ‘student hat can be taken off a bit – it makes us more accessible.” Students and faculty both benefit.

MODEL

The journal club class allowed faculty to model for graduate students the importance of setting time aside for collective reflection and discussion. “The students are really busy,” Bird noted. “They’re taking classes, doing research, a lot of them teach. It’s an important thing to encourage them to interact in an environment that isn’t super formal.”

Bird and his colleagues are planning a follow up course for next fall. “We’re thinking about offering classes on grant writing, scientific writing and scientific presentation,” he said. “Those are very important parts of any job post-PhD, whether it’s in the private sector or in academia.”

Bird’s experience in both sectors is something he draws on in his teaching and research at CUNY.

Assistant professor Jeff Bird, with undergraduate Anna Liu in his lab, introducing an ongoing course that builds skill and community among graduate students.
TELLING THE TRUTH
What does CUNY need—a raise or modernization?

By STEVE LONDON
PSC First Vice President

W hat does CUNY need to better serve its students and all New Yorkers? There is a growing consensus across the University, among both instructional staff and administrators, about the need for three things: 
° more full-time and capital aid front and center in our message on the State and City budgets. In the course of the union’s contract campaign, our members have heard from college presidents, provosts and deans of their understanding of our uncompensated salary and teaching load, and the difficulties these create for the colleges in recruitment and retention. Policy makers from the governor to City Council members also have heard of our need to lift average salaries that lag behind comparable public universities, of our need to replace physical infrastructure that has deteriorated. They understand our message: CUNY needs significant new resources to undo the effects of decades of underfunding.

As the University has aggressively sought to recruit and retain a new generation of instructional staff over the past eight years, its inability to compete effectively has become increasingly evident. Opinion makers in New York State are starting to acknowledge that CUNY and SUNY need major new investment. We should all promote that position.

DISCORD

But Chancellor Goldstein has decided to introduce a discordant note into the midst of this growing agreement. In public appearances on college campuses and at national meetings, he has been saying that the PSC-CUNY contract has to be “modernized” to bring CUNY into the 21st century. When he speaks of “modernization,” he prominently mentions that the contract should provide for “performance-based” pay. We should also remember the other demands CUNY management currently has on the bargaining table to restructure the contract, e.g., reduced job security, elimination of salary steps, and department chairs out of the PSC bargaining unit.

As the chancellor told the annual conference of the National Center for the Study of Collective Bargaining in Higher Education and the professions on April 7, “Flexibility, nimbleness, continuous investment, and performance rewards will and should be the way universities operate.”

UNCOMPETITIVE

For its part, the union has made clear that to bring CUNY into the 21st century and better serve its students, it must solve three major structural issues that stand in the way of recruiting and retaining faculty: uncompetitive salaries, uncompetitive workloads, and an exploitative adjunct system.

For Goldstein, “modernization” of CUNY means more discretion and control for management, more hierarchy, and less job security for faculty and professional staff. These proposals provide for new resources, just greater corporatization of the university.

SCARCITY

In his April 7 speech, Goldstein points to the decline in government support for publuc higher education and accepts that this defunding will continue. His proposals to corporatize the University are thus situated within a mentality of scarcity, where management is charged with making do with less. Performance-based pay or “merit” pay fits into this model, because it allows for a chosen few with higher salaries. This strategy would allow management to burnish a “star” image while investing little in the vast majority of faculty and professional staff. As he promotes this corporate strategy, the chancellor’s message is that the University can operate effectively with scarce resources, that it can run on a shining exteriors but “shining exteriors” management, however, contradicts both the PSC’s and CUNY management’s State and City lobbying efforts.

This is a time when we all should be focused on a unified message that the lack of resources across a wide range of areas compromises CUNY’s ability to adequately serve our students. The chancellor’s attack on the structure of the PSC-CUNY contract not only steps on such a unified message, his proposals imply that to the public that there is a problem with faculty and staff performance that needs to be managed through a system of incentive pay. This is not true. The problem at CUNY is the entire salary scale is too low and we lack adequate resources.

As the chancellor well knows, the contract and CUNY bylaws already provide for an extensive system of performance-based reappointment, promotion and tenure, with faculty peer review. And the PSC has long advocated at the bargaining table that a similar performance-based promotional system should be extended to the CUNY workforce.

The problem is not our performance, it’s that at CUNY we lack adequate resources.

Peer-reviewed, merit-based decisions on reappointment, promotion and tenure are routinely made throughout the University and have been for years. The contract has due-process protections to guarantee that this process is fair and unbiased. Neither the chancellor nor other administrators have offered substantive criticisms of the merit-based system that CUNY already has. The vague assertions that faculty and staff modernize” is little more than a thin veil over an attempt to grab discretionary power for management without any real data to back it up.

VAGUE ASSERTION

The union has reached agreements with management in past contract negotiations that deal with real problems facing our members and the University. For example, the union agreed with management to extend the tenure clock for an additional two years to allow for additional time to review new tenure candidates. Also, because of recruitment and retention problems, the union agreed to an across-the-board proviso that allows for salary increases up to 16% of base salary. While these agreements were controversial among our membership, in the end we agreed to them because, in part, they addressed real problems.

The contractual tools already exist for performance-based reappointment, promotion and tenure. The union has an obligation to our members and the public to see to it that all CUNY students get an excellent education and this requires restoring all of our salaries to competitive levels. Cherry-picking a few faculty and staff to reward with extra compensation will do little to improve education for the vast majority of our students.

PUBLIC SUPPORT

CUNY needs to win public support for making a new and significant investment in public higher education. To do so, the union and management should work together to promote unified themes based in the reality of our condition.

There is a real story to tell about how important CUNY is to New York and how seriously CUNY has been under-resourced since the fiscal crisis period of the 1970s. There is a real story to tell about how hard our students work to overcome great difficulties and receive an education.

Our students, above all, deserve our unified efforts and truth telling: CUNY needs a raise!

Truth in advertising: New York needs CUNY and CUNY needs a raise, this PSC TV commercial tells viewers in New York City and Albany.

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OPINION

May-June 2008

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Clarin May-June 2008
Union responds to CUNY offer

By BARBARA BOWEN  
PSC President

A
d of contract protests on a dozen campuses and a PSC demonstration at the April Board of Trustees meeting, CUNY representatives came to the table with an economic offer on Monday, May 12. They were joined at the bargaining session by the New York City Labor Commissioner and other City representatives. CUNY’s initial economic offer is for a 57-month contract with increases of 3.15%, 3% and 3% plus an additional 2% to address other economic needs and a $50 per capita increase to Welfare Fund contributions.

In proposing the 2% for additional economic needs, CUNY’s representatives acknowledged that the PSC has identified several additional needs for this round of bargaining. They also cited management demands for “performance pay” and for the introduction of a new full-time faculty position in certain fields—a “clinical professor.” Management’s representatives made no mention of their demands (still on the table) to eliminate salary steps, reduce job security for HEO employees or remove department chairs from the bargaining unit.

BEGINNING

I want to stress that CUNY’s offer—which is more than eight months overdue—represents the beginning of the economic discussion. Much more discussion will follow, and already in the work since the offer was made, an accelerated schedule of informal meetings has begun. Given the worsening economic climate, however, the PSC bargaining team is concerned about CUNY’s long delay in coming to the table with money. But now that the economic discussion has begun, we are prepared to work around the clock to reach a settlement. Your pressure was essential in moving these negotiations forward and defining the major issues. It will continue to be important as we work to bring the talks to a close.

INITIAL

While CUNY’s initial economic proposal is a serious offer, it falls dramatically short of the amount needed to lift salaries to an acceptable level and address other critical issues. CUNY cannot wait to address the growing salary crisis. The gap between our salaries and salaries at comparable institutions has been growing for 36 years; it has reached the point where it must be addressed now if CUNY is to remain at all competitive nationally. Increases near the level of inflation will not begin to close the 20% salary gap separating CUNY and other comparable public universities.

Speaking for the union negotiating team, I responded to management’s offer by stressing the need to add value to the economic package. CUNY’s failure to provide competitive salaries is tearing the University apart. Uninsured faculty are leaving for better jobs, senior scholars are being recruited elsewhere, and top candidates for CUNY positions are turning CUNY down. The future of the University is at stake. The union is aware of current economic conditions, but a salary offer of this size signals a lack of commitment to future. CUNY has made sure that Chancellor Goldstein’s salary remains competitive, increasing it by 58% since 2003. Our salaries must also increase.

At the bargaining table, we engaged CUNY’s representatives in a discussion of enhancing the value of the economic package and affirmed our willingness to work with management to rebuild CUNY salaries.

The union began this round of bargaining by identifying our collective priorities for this phase of contract negotiations and announcing them at our October 2007 mass meeting. We addressed those priorities—starting with salaries—at the May 12 session. CUNY management’s offer suggested that they had heard our message about the importance of several issues beyond salary. Speaking for the union, I emphasized the urgency of raising the value of the top salary step in every title and every rank; of providing paid family leave; and of offering health insurance to the many instructional staff members at CUNY who are uninsured or underinsured. We discussed the need for stable health insurance for eligible adjuncts, and both sides acknowledged that progress is being made on health insurance for graduate employees through other avenues.

While the union challenged several economic features of the offer and raised a number of technical questions, we also called on management to respond to the demand for adjunct job security. It is not acceptable—either pedagogically or ethically—for CUNY to go on treating half the faculty as if they were disposable. An adjunct can teach at CUNY for 15 years, contribute profoundly to students’ CUNY experience, and then be told on a moment’s notice that he or she is no longer needed. CUNY survived two decades of budget slashing by hiring a part-time labor force paid a fraction of full-time salaries. It is unfair and unbecoming of a university to turn its back on that labor force whenever the opportunity arises.

The union also objected to the concept of “performance pay.” One-time awards of money, not added into base pay and given at the discretion of the college president, are not substitute for true salary increases. We need real salary increases, not fake ones. A similar provision, the “Performance Excellence Award,” was included in the 1996-2000 contract; it was roundly rejected by members and not continued in later contracts. The PSC urged management to concentrate on across-the-board increases and raise the top steps of all ranks rather than illusory and divisive proposals for “performance pay.”

OUR PRIORITIES

In the week since the May 12 session, the two sides have met in several smaller, informal meetings with the goal of making real progress. The union remains open to hearing further details of management’s proposals, but we are committed to the priorities our members have articulated. It was clear even from this initial economic session that our priorities have been heard, but unless the economic offer is expanded, CUNY will put a whole generation of faculty, staff—and students—at risk. We may need to call on you in the coming days and weeks to support the work of the bargaining team. Do not underestimate the power we have when we speak and act together. Stay in touch with the union, even if you are going away for all or part of the summer, by signing “This Week in the PSC,” the union’s e-mail bulletin and by checking the union website (www.psc-cuny.org). Thank you for the support you have shown so far.

If you don’t currently receive “This Week in the PSC,” you can sign up for this update at www.psc-cuny.org/ThisWeek.htm.

CUNY must add value to proposal

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