The Queens College PSC Chapter has joined with other unions on campus to attack long-standing problems. They have won improvements in working conditions, from health and safety to promotions.

On the last day of the old contract, members from across CUNY let their creativity loose in the PSC Union Hall. They sang, danced, drew, performed poetry and even PowerPointed to illustrate what CUNY might look like in the future, under union or management contract demands.

The August 18 Deutsche Bank blaze that killed two firefighters has heightened community concerns about the demolition of BMCC’s Fiterman Hall. CUNY and its contractors await regulators’ approval to begin decontamination, but PSC members and allies wonder if they have learned all the lessons of the Deutsche Bank disaster.

On Tuesday, October 30, at 6:00 pm, the union will hold a mass membership meeting on the contract campaign. Come to Cooper Union for the latest news from the bargaining table, discussion of campaign strategy and an evening of union spirit. Meet your colleagues from across CUNY, and consider what we can do together to shape the outcome.

The PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund is offering a new program for long-term care insurance. Long-term care provides help with activities of daily living, which may be needed due to illness, injury or advanced age.

New long-term care insurance program

Today’s students take longer to earn diplomas – but college has lasting benefits, for them and society.

ANALYSIS
Grad rate debate

SOLIDARITY
Labor coalition wins campus fixes

UTOPIA, DYSTOPIA
Our CUNY versus Their CUNY

BENEFITS

FIRE SAFETY
Community scrutiny for Fiterman plans

PAGES 4

PAGE 6-7

PAGE 8

PAGES 3, 5 & 11

PAGE 9

PAGE 10
Drivers' licenses & immigrants in NY

We who work with a large immigrant student population, who know the challenges, aspirations and efforts of these students, can stand with them and their organizations by supporting Spitzer's more humane and rational proposal.

For a more comprehensive view of this issue, the website www.thenyc.org is helpful.

John Hyland
LaGuardia (emeritus)

Cutting off college access?

● If CUNY Central has its way, it will soon be more difficult for many students to enter a CUNY senior college. Beginning in Spring 2009, CUNY Central wants to raise the SAT math cutoff score from the current 480 to 500 at six senior colleges and to 510 at the “top five” colleges. Students will still be able to substitute a passing score on the Math Compass test or the Regents exam, but the Compass test also will have higher cutoff scores. The Regents math cutoff will remain the same pending a state review of the test. New cutoffs on the reading and writing tests will follow.

These changes give unwarranted and harmful power to standardized tests. The data so far indicate that the tests are weak or worthless predictors of success at our University and disproportionately limit the opportunities of students of color. Since 1999, when CUNY mandated standardized test cutoffs for admission to bachelor’s degree programs, three senior colleges – City, Baruch and Hunter – have suffered sharp drops in black enrollment. The new cutoffs will further weaken our ability to provide opportunities to those disenfranchised by our society.

Bill Drain
City College

Lessons of experience

● I read Barbara Bowen’s article in the Summer 2007 Clarion concerning the union’s proposal for a Certificate of Continuous Employment (CCE) for adjuncts. While it sounds like a great way to approach the issue of seniority and job security, I wonder whether this approach suffers from the same flaws that were incorporated in the agreement concerning adjunct lecturer conversion lines.

In a meeting of the Committee for Part-Time Personnel attended by Barbara, I described why I thought the qualification criteria for conversion lines were too narrow. Barbara agreed that there should be multiple alternative criteria, and said that she would seek a revision in the next round of bargaining.

Some of the factors that caused my exclusion from eligibility for a conversion line include:

- Teaching a specialized course offered once per year or once per semester
- Appointments to two campuses
- Course cancellation
- Appointment as a fractional visiting lecturer
- Conversion line criteria in the current agreement could be made more inclusive by offering a variety of criteria that could be used to establish eligibility. I hope the bargaining team is pursuing this, and that any agreement concerning CCEs benefits from our conversion line experience.

Stan Wine
Baruch College

PSC: President Barbara Bowen reponds:

I am grateful to Stan for his close attention to the details of eligibility for conversion lines; one of the suggestions made by adjuncts and department chairs about eligibility criteria was already incorporated into the guidelines for last year’s selection. Just to clarify, though: speaking for the PSC negotiation team, I said that we were glad to receive suggestions for improvements in the eligibility requirements for any future conversion lines and that we would consider these suggestions if any further conversion lines were negotiated. Meanwhile the PSC is pressing hard for a more global solution to CUNY’s scandalous lack of job security for half of its faculty – a Certificate of Continuous Employment for eligible adjuncts who have long-term successful service to the University. We will consider the suggestions from members about conversion lines and the experience of departments with them last year as we discuss this proposal.

TIAA, TRS & COLA

● Now that pension equity has been attained for active TIAA participants, it seems appropriate that similar equity should be pursued for TIAA retirees.

TIAA retirees get an annual Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to their pensions to offset inflation. TIAA retirees do not have similar protection.

It is only fair that an inflation hedge, similar to that of TRS, be afforded to TIAA retirees.

Howard Reznikoff
 Kingsborough CC (retired)

A win for immigrants

On October 1, representatives from the PSC and other groups in the NY Coalition for Immigrants’ Rights to Driver’s Licenses assembled at City Hall to celebrate Gov. Eliot Spitzer’s new policy that all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, will have equal access to driver’s licenses.
Uncompetitive salaries hurt CUNY

By DANA RAJENDRA

“We’re not even in the ballpark,” explained Assistant Professor Patrick Lloyd of the Physical Science Department at Kingsborough. “We have lines that have been open for more than a year, and we just can’t fill them.”

CUNY salaries are low. That fact is keeping CUNY from recruiting and retaining full-time faculty, PSC members say.

“We had interest in the job from someone with a PhD from Columbia and a post-doc at Berkeley. We made an offer, and this person ended up getting a position at one of the New York City public schools for $20,000 more than we offered,” Lloyd said.

“We’re simply not competitive,” explained Baruch Sociology Department Chair Glenn Petersen, who has taught at CUNY for 30 years. In that time, the value of CUNY salaries has dropped steeply in real dollars.

Top steps in most titles have dropped steeply, from 30% to 75% since 1971, adjusting for inflation. The bottom and median steps showed even bigger declines in value, between 40% and 50%.

DECLINE

This means that in 2007, a professor or a Higher Education Officer on the top step now earns about $85,000 less in real dollars than a top-step professor or CEO did in 1971. An assistant professor on the median step now earns about $45,000 less, after adjusting for inflation.

Salaries for lecturers, college lab technicians, assistants to CEO and part-time faculty and staff have also seen major declines in purchasing power, slightly moderated by equity increases. The hourly rate for adjunct lecturers in 1971, today’s dollars, was $7.70. It is now $10.18 – compared to a rate of $69 today. Yet today CUNY is doubling down on its part-time faculty, who teach about half of its courses.

The PSC shared these numbers with CUNY administration over the bargaining table last spring. But so far, this argument has made no proposal to repair the damage. Instead, CUNY has demanded the elimination of salary steps, to replace them with a system of raises based on the college president’s discretion. (For details, see page 11 of the September 2007 Clarion, at www.psc-cuny.org/mediacenter.)

“The salary steps provide real advances for our members, each step increases pay by 3% to 6%,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. “The problem is, the value of the steps is eroding – so it is as if our members are stuck in a downward-moving escalator.”

From 1971 to 1983, during the NYU fiscal crisis, all titles saw a steep decline in real wages. Median salaries dropped in value by 30% to 40%, according for most of the loss to the date.

The PSC negotiated increases in the mid-80s that made up between half and one-third of this lost ground, but real wages declined again throughout the 1990s, going even lower than before. It wasn’t until the contract signed in 2002 that salaries began to stop sliding. The 2000-2002 agreement provided increases somewhat ahead of inflation, while the following one, like other City agreements at the time, was somewhat behind. The net result is that, despite some increases of present value, salaries have lost half to two-thirds of their value in a generation.

HUGE GAP

Phil Eggers, a professor of English at BMCC, has worked at CUNY since 1971. “It used to be that if you told somebody you taught at CUNY, they’d say, ‘Oh, guys you pay, you don’t hire anymore. Now you just short of shrug and say, ‘How do you manage?’”

If management tried to cut pay by 40% in one year, Eggers said, they would face a rebellion. “It’s been relentless, but you don’t necessarily perceive it from year to year. It’s when you put it together over 10 years, 20 years, you realize how large a change has come about.”

Eggers was chair of his department for 18 years, and he said that CUNY’s salary slide had a serious effect on recruitment. “Our workload is very heavy, and the cost of living in New York has gotten absurd,” he said.

“So it’s become very hard to bring in new faculty from outside. One department chair, who asked not to be identified, said their own department recently carried out the “widest search we have ever done.” After interviewing five finalists, the job was offered in the third top choices. All negotated with the dean, but ultimately declined the position. “We were left with having offered the position over several months and still not having somebody by the time we reopened the search.” After another round of interviews, the job was offered and rejected twice. Finally, the department hired the third person to whom they’d offered the job.

This chair praised the new hire as a scholar with a lot to offer CUNY – but CUNY may be doubly disadvantaged, because it pays below-par wages in a city with a very high cost of living. And today those low salaries hurt CUNY’s recruitment and retention more than ever: “The [increased] college hiring trend is nationwide,” reports Crain’s New York Business, “but New York City, which has become the top destination in the country for students from national and international nations, is seeing the sharpest growth.” That means other universities in NYC are “aggressively recruiting candidates,” and departments at CUNY generally can’t match their offers.

The low salaries at CUNY are particularly tough because of New York’s expensive housing market. According to Crain’s, in NYC, “often universities subsidize rents or give housing stipends to new professors.” At CUNY, the chancellor and other NYC universities, many CUNY departments also face competition from outside academia.

“The nursing faculty shortage is as bad or worse as the national nursing shortage,” said Mary O’Donnell, chair of the nursing department at College of Staten Island. “Students who come out of our associate’s degree program and pass the license exam earn around $65,000. We’re lucky if we can hire a faculty member with a PhD for that salary.”

O’Donnell said Clarion that this poses serious problems for recruitment. “There are nurse practitioners with a master’s degree to whom we say, ‘We’d love to have you teach full-time, but you really need your PhD, or at least be close to that.’ They’re earning $80 to $90,000. They need to stop what they’re doing and go back to school, in order to earn less.” Despite the attractions of a tenure-track job, she said, “Why would they do that?”

A similar problem exists in the accounting department at Baruch. “Low salaries are absolutely a major problem at Baruch,” said Professor of Accounting Marilyn Neimark. Baruch has used provis for overscale pay to recruit they are more willing to leave. “It’s very wasteful,” she concluded.

Frank Kirkland, chair of philosophy at Hunter, said that he has received support for addressing salary imbalances in his own department. “I have been fortunate in securing some upgrades in salaries for recently tenured faculty because of the low-balling of their initial hires,” he said. “But many chairpersons have not been as fortunate. This speaks to the need for restoration of competitive salaries across the board,” Kirkland said.

REPAIRING the damage done to CUNY’s salaries since the 1970s is a necessity, said Petersen of Baruch.

“The University is cutting its own throat,” he told Clarion. “It is a mockery for (Chancellor) Goldstein to tell us $370,000 for a much finer university when he is not fighting for salaries to hire people.”

“In the late 60s and 70s we recruited a generation of faculty with competitive rates, and they are now retiring,” said London. “We must recruit a new generation, we need to make the same investment in them – and in CUNY’s future.”

CUNY salaries don’t measure up

Full-time faculty lured away

Source: Annual AAUP salary survey, fall 2006 data.
Unity at CUNY colleges

By STEPHANIE HORVATH

Queens College is not the only PSC chapter to collaborate with other campus unions. In 2006, the Bronx Community College (BCC) PSC chapter confronted health and safety problems ranging from leaky ceilings in the library to potential asbestos hazards in departmental offices. BCC Chapter Chair Marianne Pita said her chapter tackled this issue through joint organizing efforts with AFSCME DC 37, the union representing the buildings and grounds department at BCC.

“It was very helpful to work together. We ended up calling a meeting of the library staff and every single person in both unions came,” Pita said. “It was a very powerful group, and there was very powerful testimony from many people in both unions about upper respiratory problems they had when they walked into the building. This was heard by management and I think it intensified the pressure to solve the issue.”

SAFETY

In response, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) hosted a series of health and safety workshops at the BCC campus. Following these workshops, the BCC PSC chapter and AFSCME DC 37 proposed a joint health and safety committee that would hold regular meetings with management. So far college administration has rejected the idea, saying it is not needed.

But Pita said that health and safety was on everyone’s mind, and the two unions are discussing a revival of the joint committee proposal. She told Clarion that she sees the committee as a necessary step in order to make progress on these problems.

SOCIALS

In recent years the PSC chapter at York College has united several campus unions with a different goal in mind – eating sweets and having fun. The York College chapter has twice hosted a “Multi-Union Gala Pre-Holiday Dessert Fest,” both of which were well-attended. Janice Cline, PSC chapter chair at York, said that part of the appeal is “an opportunity for people of different positions in the college to get together socially and to find new opportunities to know and respect one another.”

Cline said that this kind of event can be “a great idea to get things going on a campus where you need to have better relations.”

Campus coalition boasts wins

By DANIA RAJENDRA

With patience and persistence, a loose group of union representatives at Queens College has become a serious labor action over the last couple of years. One which gets action from the college administration.

“When we go to management well-informed and with solidarity, they take us seriously,” said Diane Men na, a PSC officer for part-time personnel and a coalition participant.

While other PSC chapters, including those at Bronx Community College and Rockland Community College, made joint efforts with other campus unions, the experience at Queens has been the most developed. It began in 2005 within the Queens PSC chapter’s health and safety committee. Headed by Professor Brette Weismann of the English department, the committee had been staging regular “tenants’ meetings” to document problems in particular buildings.

“But if we really wanted to know what was going on,” explained committee member Bob Chitty, “we had to talk to the custodians, the laborers and especially the trades — carpenters, plumbers, electricians, stationary engineers. We had to talk to all the unions.”

Exciting

Thus was born the idea of the Queens College Unions Joint Committee on Quality of Work Life. As the committee worked, more unions at Queens joined in the PSC took the lead. Chitty, a Higher Education Associate and member of the PSC leadership on campus, went to human resources and found out many unions — and which ones — represented campus employees. They refused to tell him.

A laborer, a custodian and sometime student of the labor movement, Chitty is co-author with University President Katharine Cobb of a book, “From the Folks Who Brought You the Weekend: A Short Illustrated History of Labor in the United States.” So he took management’s response as a challenge. Chitty combed through websites, contracts and other sources and found that there were at least 17 different unions with members on the Queens College campus.

Menana and Chitty began contacting these unions to identify local representatives who could be invited to a meeting. “In the beginning it was the largest union on campus.” Menana remembered.

“We’d get one person showing up from one union, then two from other unions, then back down to one. People came in tentatively, and we would explain the idea to them, and they wanted to know more about us,” said Chitty. “They seemed to be wondering, ‘what do these professors want?’”

It took many phone calls and about a year, but eventually “it became evident to people who did come how productive it could be and they’d get very excited about it,” Menana recalled. “As we started to get more and more people, it felt fantastic. It was energizing. It began to feel like a coalition.”

Joint committee member Joseph Perry, AFSCME Laborers Local 924, said, “This committee is great. It does something I have never seen at Queens College — bridge the gap between faculty and staff.”

Health and safety problems quickly emerged as a common concern for all the union representatives. They were also concerned about personnel practices. “At QC, there was an incredible lack of transparency in the hiring and promotion process and for notifying employees working near the site about the hazard. After the letter was received, the college reassessed the site. ‘The college treated to mold as the City calls a Level 1 site — a small, isolated area which can be cleaned by regular maintenance staff. It turned out to be a Level 4 site with extensive contamination, which requires specialized professional treatment,’” Chitty explained. The college quickly hired a certified mold remediation firm.

“I really believe that the letter was what produced that result,” said Goodwin. “At first I was a little reluctant to participate in the committee, because I thought there might be repercussions. But now, I don’t care if they’re mad at me — I did the right thing.”

The joint committee invited Vice President Jonathan Buchsbaum signing on behalf of the college to a meeting to inform the college’s health and safety officer, William Graffeo, met with the committee in June. Over the summer the committee got quick reassurance from the college administration.

“Menna and Chitty are the ones who found it,” said President Katharine Cobb to discuss the use of contractors and whether college staff could be paid overtime for routine work that can’t be done by a local. “We have all really benefited from these meetings. It is important to us to inform and with solidarity, they have been able to do that.”

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Momentum gathers for mass meeting on Oct. 30

Winning a good contract

By PETER HOGNESS

On October 30, the Professional Staff Congress/CUNY will hold a mass membership meeting on the contract campaign in the historic Great Hall at Cooper Union.

“Come to the meeting for the same reasons you signed the petition,” said Mike Fabricant, PSC treasurer and co-chair of the union’s contract organizing committee. “It’s a public show of support for the union’s bid for a university that offers competitive salaries, job security and good benefits for all.

We want a university that treats employees with respect and gives students the education they deserve.”

The meeting will feature a report on the latest developments at the bargaining table and will lay out union plans for the next step in the contract fight. Union leaders and members will discuss the challenges posed by the history of pattern bargaining and today’s political climate in New York State. They’ll talk about how the PSC can achieve a good settlement and what it will take to win.

A short film will show the delivery of the petition signed by 5,534 faculty and staff to CUNY’s headquarters on East 80th Street. It happened on Sept. 19, the day the old contract expired, and the union asked Chancellor Matthew Goldstein to meet with a group of rank-and-file union members about their contract concerns. Goldstein said no — but on camera, those members tell us that they would have said if the Chancellor had been willing to listen.

“When we bring a thousand members together, CUNY will have to listen,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “Every time people show their support for the union on this scale, management moves. They may not want to admit it, but we see the results at the bargaining table — it’s very clear.”

WORD Spreads

To produce that kind of turnout, campus activists are spreading the word about Oct 30 and why it’s important. “We just had the junior faculty orientation that our chapter does every year, where we outlined management’s contract demands,” said Carolina Bank Muñoz, a chapter executive committee member at Brooklyn College.

“Management only moves in response to member pressure.”

Duboys said that it’s usually easy to convince them to come on October 30. “It was an exciting event, and people remember it favorably,” she said. “I’m getting a lot of positive feedback.”

“But it’s an opportunity to meet other faculty and staff from across CUNY,” said Rebecca Hill, an organizing committee member at BMCC. “That doesn’t happen often enough, and union events are one of the main places where it occurs. And to be in a room with that many people, seeing everyone there from across the University — it’s a powerful experience. When you see how many others are involved, it can give you a broader sense of what’s possible.”

Be there!

The PSC mass membership meeting is set for Tuesday, October 30, 6:00 to 8:30 pm in the Great Hall at Cooper Union. The entrance is just off 3rd Avenue and East 7th Street. Closest subway stops are the 6 train to Astor Place, or the M or W trains to 8th Street. Since 1858, the Great Hall has been the site of historic meetings for workers’ rights, women’s rights and racial justice. Those who have spoken there include Frederick Douglass, Emma Goldman and Mark Twain.

Sept. 19 petition delivery

By PETER HOGNESS

“A great university provides the conditions, as Michael Ignatieff said, “to want to tell other people about something.”

That’s what 5,534 PSC members asked CUNY management by signing a petition that began with that pledge that CUNY would not come away our step increases? I’ll definitely come to the meeting!”

CUNY management’s demand to eliminate step increases, and impose a system where raises would come at the college president’s discretion, “would really hit people in their wallet,” said Bank Muñoz and would especially hurt new employes.

“CUNY’s excuses for this failure won’t wash. ‘It is the responsibility of management to bring these issues forward,’” she said. “Let them light a fire under the State and City! If the Chancellor is serious, let him talk [to PSC President] Barbara Bowen with him to argue for better salaries from the City and State.” (See page 1.)

If people came to the PSC’s last mass membership meeting, in 2005, Duboys said that it’s usually easy to convince them to come on October 30.

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Members mobilize

Union activists on campus are spreading the word about the PSC’s mass membership meeting on October 30. And one of their key tools is the union’s member-to-member network, dubbed “My Five.”

The name comes from the basic idea: volunteers in the “My Five” network stay in touch with five other union members to help keep them informed about the issues in contract negotiations and important events like the October 30 meeting.

“The October 30 event is a great way for people to use the ‘My Fives,’ and it’s a great way to sign people up to join the network for the first time,” said Carolina Bank Muñoz, a chapter activist at Brooklyn College. “Asking someone to talk to five coworkers about Oct 30 is very concrete, and it’s easy to do. Even if someone’s never been active in a union before, it’s natural to want to tell other people about something important.”

Chapter Chair Tibbi Duboys told Clarion that at Brooklyn, organizers want to make it as easy as possible for people to get involved. “We’re reaching out to new people and encouraging them to have a connection with the union in the way that works for them. If they’re not prepared to talk with five people, we’re asking them to have a conversation with at least one of their colleagues. We want to build a culture of conversation on union issues, which will help us all have stronger connections in the future.”

PH

Goldstein refused to meet with members.

To honor our students, faculty and staff, CUNY needs to provide adequate wages for all employees,” said Carolina Bank Muñoz, a chapter executive committee member at Brooklyn College. “We just had the junior faculty orientation that our chapter does every year, where we outlined management’s contract demands,” said Carolina Bank Muñoz, a chapter executive committee member at Brooklyn College.

“We can hear you inside during the meeting,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told the crowd when she came back outside.

“What do we want? A contract! When do we want it? Now! You sounded great!”

Bowen said that when she presented the petition, she asked the chancellor to commit “to making a decent salary offer in this round [to pledge] that CUNY would not come to the table proposing increases below inflation.” She also asked that CUNY drop its demands for union givebacks — the elimination of salary steps, reduction of HEQ job security, taking department chairs out of the union and others. “But he would not make either pledge,” she reported.

The two sides met again in bargaining three days later, where CUNY still declined to make any economic offer. Discussions continued on non-economic issues, including management proposals on grievance and arbitration procedures and the PSC proposal for a sick leave “bank” through which employees could donate some of their sick days to others.

PSC bargaining team members have been holding a series of campus meetings with members, and PSC First Vice President Steve London said those sessions have been well attended. “There’s a sense of appreciation for the victories that the union has won, such as on pension equity or HEQ overtime, and there’s a willingness to get involved,” he said. “People understand that those victories came about through member action, and they understand that the same will be true for any gains in our next contract.”

City Tech English Professor Brian Keener and City College HEO Jean Weisman were among the 5,534 PSC members who signed the PSC petition. The names were listed on huge placards and the petition was delivered to the chancellor.
Our CUNY vs. Their CUNY: A Musical

We join this play in progress, just after Professor Shifrin has sung “The 27-Hour Blues,” about her heavy workload teaching English at a CUNY community college. Professor Sullivan remarks that her own work week isn’t as bad because she doesn’t teach writing-intensive classes. But perhaps she spoke too soon…

PROFESSOR SULLIVAN (to the tune of Gilbert and Sullivan’s “I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major General”):

I am a very conscientious history professor
I spend 10 hours reading books before I give each lecture
From Spartacus to Reconstruction, Manitou to mass production
I use computers in my class because it’s pedagogical
I write my own exams and quizzes, that’s at least two hours I bet
I am a very conscientious history professor.

It’s 47 hours and we haven’t got to grading yet
I do more than I’m asked because it seems to me I’ve got the time
The students really need me see, they visit on the regular –
I’m a very conscientious history professor.

It’s 47 hours and we haven’t got to grading yet
I spend 7 hours weekly on those methods Paolo-Freirian…
(hmm, Paolo Freirian…)
And if I have two preps it’s 27 hours I’m carryin’!

I’m 15 hours in the classroom and five more in the office clime
I do more than I’m asked because it seems to me I’ve got the time
The students really need me see, they visit on the regular –
I am a very conscientious history professor.

Administrative meetings are another duty of my week
The total’s now at 54 – I think I might be getting sick
Add another five for grading – piles which are so very thick
I spend seven hours weekly on those methods Paolo-Freirian…
(hmm, Paolo Freirian…)
And if I have two preps it’s 27 hours I’m carryin’!

I’m 15 hours in the classroom and five more in the office clime
I do more than I’m asked because it seems to me I’ve got the time
The students really need me see, they visit on the regular –
I am a very conscientious history professor.

“News from the near future
CUNY announces new bargaining stance

NEW YORK, the day after tomorrow (AP) – Matthew Goldstein, chancellor of the City University of New York, called a press conference this afternoon to announce that the University is taking a radically new stance in its bargaining with the Professional Staff Congress, the union that represents CUNY’s faculty and professional staff.

“It is clear to me,” he stated, “that the best way to build the kind of top-quality, nationally-competitive, student-oriented university we aspire to be is by giving our faculty the best contract possible. I, of course, have long held this view, but recent events have convinced me that the time to act is now.”

Goldstein, who appeared uncharacteristically disheveled, almost shaken, said that in the last few days he had held extended meetings with new faculty members from campuses across the University. “After meeting face-to-face with junior faculty members, I feel as if something in me just…snapped,” he said. “How is it that, for several years running, we have had no provisions for parental leave? How can we claim to be a top-flight university if our faculty cannot afford childcare or approach the possibility of home ownership? If 90% of our junior faculty are eating peanut butter and jelly for lunch, what does that say about the overall health of our University?”

Apparently, hundreds of junior faculty members had converged on the chancellor’s place of work, demanding a meeting which was said to have lasted 36 straight hours. “Our new faculty members are a remarkably persuasive group,” the chancellor stated in reference to the meeting, which one member of his staff referred to as “harrowing.”

Also present at the meeting were department chairs from several campuses. Asked why so many chairs had accompanied their junior colleagues, Chancellor Goldstein explained, “They showed me long lists of what they called casualties of our austerity contracts – talented young faculty who had left CUNY after a year or two to take positions with budgets for research and smaller class sizes.”

Goldstein stated that, as a first step, he would seek to increase faculty and staff salaries by roughly 40% over three years. “Such an increase,” he explained, “would merely bring salaries in line with levels during the 1970s, when the University was compensating its workers on a par with other New York City-area institutions of higher education.”

“Wow,” said Joan Smith, assistant professor of English at Brooklyn College. “Does this mean the University is actually going to put its money where its mouth is? Will I actually be able to afford the dental crown work that I’ve been putting off for three years?”

“We’ve always wanted to make all of CUNY an honors college, to treat all our faculty like distinguished professors,” the chancellor said. “And now we may have the chance.”

Imagined by James Davis and Joseph Entin, Brooklyn College.
The union’s Contract Organizing Committee set the stage over the summer, with a call for members to “contribute a piece of creative work that illustrates what life would be like under management’s demands, or under the PSC’s demands,” as a result of the current contract negotiations. The underlying point was that each side’s bargaining agenda implies a very different vision of the kind of university that CUNY should become.

On these two pages are some of the works that made up the evening’s program. There are many more, and you can see the rest on the union’s website, at www.psc-cuny.org/OurCUNY.htm. If all this inspires you to create something of your own, consider submitting it for publication in Clarion. Our address and e-mail can be found on page 2.

The tea cart

By PAGE DELANO, BMCC

I think there are some places where they serve sherry in the late afternoon, and at Columbia there’s tea for graduate students, and I know there are a lot of offices in the city where there are coffee carts in the morning – I mean you pay for it, it’s not free, that’s cool. Now it’s time to create the tea cart. It’ll roll around on the different floors and you can go out into the main hall and buy tea or coffee and a little cookie or fruit tart and talk shop, talk union, talk books, talk dreams and things you’re working out. I mean I know we have a lot of different schedules, but the talking tea cart will give you a little boost between 3 and 5 whenever it rolls by your office, and the cookies can be in the shape of administrators’ faces, or magna cartas, or photocopy machines, which the office staff haven’t yet had repaired, or in the shapes of countries where our students come from, and the prices will be pretty good, since our paychecks seem to be shrinking, shrinking so good prices are important. We can make it an event that everyone wants to take part in – when’s my time to work the tea cart? people will demand.

OUR CUNY vs. THEIR CUNY

...without the PSC

By DAVID WINN
Hunter College

The day begins early at Benno G. Schmidt Vocational (formerly Hunter) College, the flagship campus of the City University of New York. Students, faculty and staff pour in from the subway and buses, long lines forming at the Bernie Kerik Company Security Checkpoints, where voice-and-eye identification devices are employed to insure the safety of the college population.

Entering the college is swift (unless the machines determine the need for a body cavity search), and the throng is greeted by the delicious aromas of food and beverages prepared by the many national franchise chains, who not only operate the food service options available on campus, but frequently sponsor programs and in some cases whole departments at BSVC-CUNY, making it no longer necessary for the college to rely on the prolonged, often frustrating process of public funding.

For example, purchase a latte or a machiatto at Starbucks and you’ll be presented with a cup bearing the profile of and a pithy quotation from such authors as Ayn Rand, William F. Buckley or David Brooks. The presence of these literary titans on the steaming cup of morning brew is emblematic of Starbucks’s function as the main support of BSVC’s English department and creative writing program.

Where else could an aspiring young scholar or writer find such courses as Caffeine and the Creation of a New Product & ingenious melding of scholarship and product placement presentation with a cup bearing the profile of and a pithy quotation from such authors as Ayn Rand, William F. Buckley or David Brooks. The presence of these literary titans on the steaming cup of morning brew is emblematic of Starbucks’s function as the main support of BSVC’s English department and creative writing program.

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BSVC-CUNY’s unique and ingenious melding of scholarship and product placement has set new standards for economies of scale in the academic realm and streamlined the entire culture by eliminating the need for tenure, the tedious search process, and the archaic and wrong-headed notion of peer review.

Of course, not all public funding has been eliminated. In an innovative move, the US military now sponsors the college’s physical education program. Each branch of the service now has their information office and recruitment center at sites on campus, and students may sign up for any number of programs by simply making a six-year open-ended commitment to the branch of service of their choice. A junior year abroad program is included, with Iraq, Iran, North Korea, the Philippines and other exotic destinations proving to be astonishingly popular.

Similar public funding provides backing for our new interrogative arts and motivational research program, which replaced the old and outmoded psychology department.

BSVC is committed to the environment, for that reason, the elevators and escalators have been turned off (except for administrators). Students and faculty take turns carrying each other up the stairs, providing the younger and more fit among them with both an opportunity for community service and the chance to earn some extra cash.

Since the retirement (or unexplained disappearance) of the last few tenured, full-time faculty members and the elimination of collective bargaining, BSVC has transformed itself from a staid, union-ridden, directionless campus into a forward-looking, dynamic and profitable institution. With its eyes firmly fixed on the future, its feet solidly planted on the bottom line, BSVC strives forth.

Don’t get in its way.
Spotlight on Fiterman fire safety

By DANA RAJENDRA

The August 18 fire at the Deutsche Bank building in lower Manhattan, which killed two NYC firefighters, has meant heightened scrutiny for fire safety and community notification issues in CUNY’s plans to clean, demolish and rebuild BMCC’s Fiterman Hall.

Like the Deutsche Bank building, Fiterman Hall was damaged beyond repair by the September 11 attacks. Both buildings are badly contami- nated with a range of toxic substances—asbestos, dioxin, mercury and more—but the two demolitions are being handled differently.

Unlike the problem-plagued Deutsche Bank building, which was being decommissioned as it was de- molished floor-by-floor, at Fiterman the “two-step process involves de- contamination first, then decon- struction of the building,” said CUNY spokesperson Michael Arena.

GOOD START

Union safety experts and others agree that the two-step process is better. Fiterman is also a much smaller building, which simplifies matters. And CUNY has been more forthcoming and publicly account- able than have been the companies on the Deutsche Bank job.

But advocates and experts say the University could, and should, do more. “CUNY has had several Fiter- man Hall meetings, I have to give them credit for that,” said Glenn Corbett, associate professor of fire science at John Jay College. “But, that said, they have to have a stellar plan when it comes to safety.”

According to BMCC’s website on the Fiterman project, CUNY expect- ed to have finished erecting the scap- folding needed for decontamination and demolition by September 2007.

As Clarion went to press in early October, it appeared close to completion, but government regulators had yet to approve any de- contamination plans.

Meanwhile, health and safety experts have identi- fied several concerns in the plans to clean the dilapidated Fiter- man Hall in light of the Deutsche Bank fire: the use of plastic, plywood and negative air pressure to contain the toxic elements inside the build- ing; the condition of standpipes; and community notification and emer- gency action plans.

CUNY Vice Chancellor Iris Wein- shall told a October 2 community meeting that the Deutsche Bank ex- perience informed CUNY’s plans to take down Fiterman. But Corbett and others have questioned whether CUNY and its contractors, headed by DANNY (the Dormitory Authori- ty of the State of New York), have learned all the necessary lessons.

Use of flammable plywood and plastic partitions in the Deutsche Bank building both fueled the fire and made it harder and riskier for firefighters to move inside the struc- ture. A safer alternative, Corbett said, is greenboard. “water-resistant gypsum board [that is] essentially noncombustible.” EPA guidelines suggest plywood, but Corbett says that CUNY can—and should—pass this standard.

At the October 2 meeting, officials said that the ply- wood covering the exterior of Fiterman’s south side was needed because of the severe damage to the facade from 9/11 and that its fire rating was approved by the FDNY.

But they said that plywood would not be used on the remaining sides, which are sufficiently intact so that the building’s own structure can be used to seal off the inside while decontamination work pro- ceeds. They did not address what materials are being used for interior partitions, and Arena did not re- spond to a Clarion question on the topic.

IN CASE OF FIRE

Contractors use negative air press- sure within a building to contain toxic dust and other contaminants. But negative air pressure can cause a fire to spread downward, rather than up. “We need proactive mea- sures at Fiterman to make sure there’s an emergency cutoff for neg- ative pressure,” said Dave Newman, an industrial hygienist with the NY- CERS or any of the other municipal retirement systems; rather, he was working for FISA, NYC’s Financial Information Services Agency, which processes pension checks for all the municipal retirement systems.

The data loss drew a strong protest from the PSC. “FISA has an obligation to treat that information with the same degree of care that we do,” said PSC Executive Director Debo- rah Bell wrote to FISA head Robert Townsend. “The fact that a consult- ant is carrying such records around on a laptop is particularly outrageous,” she wrote. “Why is such information allowed to be portable...and permitted to be tak- en off-site?”

FISA called for City Council hearings on creating and enforcing FISA standards for protecting re- tirees’ personal information.

FISA stated that the theft appears to have been random and the computer was password-pro- tected, limiting the likelihood of identity theft. It added that the names and other information on the laptop were “confined to a subset of City retirees.” But, since the agency was unable to determine exactly whose informa- tion was on the laptop and whose was not, it sent a letter to every sin- gle member of all municipal pension systems.

Among CUNY retirees, this es- sentially means members of TRS or NYCERS. Those who only belong to TIAA-CREF (or similar plans with- in CUNY’s Optional Retirement Program) are unaffected.

TRS told Clarion that its own data security policies are much stricter than FISA’s. TRS policies “prohibit any employee or consultant from taking any sensitive member data offsite,” said spokesman Matt Laskowski. TRS has implemented a range of security measures to en- sure that policy, Laskowski said, “For example, we have disabled CD drives and flash drives on PCs agency-wide to prevent downloading of data,” that could be removed from TRS offices.

TRS has tightened its own data security policies since early 2006, when one of its employees was found to be part of an identity theft ring — an incident that drew severe criticism. FISA offered potentially affected retirees free enrollment in Equifax Credit Watch Gold, a monitoring service from one of the main nation- al credit agencies that is supposed to alert FISA employees to attempts at identity theft. Details are available in the letter sent out by FISA or from the FISA Call Center at (212) 457-1700 or during business hours.

For more information on protect- ing yourself from identity theft, see page 9 in the December 2003 Clarion, available at www.psc-cuny.org/ communications.htm.

The fire at the problem-plagued Deutsche Bank building on August 18 killed two firefighters and heightened concerns about the plans for Fiterman Hall.

Committee for Occupational Safety & Health (NYCOSH).

Should a fire occur, it is critical that standpipes — which deliver wa- ter to firefighters’ hoses — be in working order. In the Deutsche Bank building, standpipes were cut and sections of pipe were missing, leaving firefighters without water to ex- tinguish the blaze. At a Communi- ty Advisory Board meeting on Au- gust 21, Paul Stein, a Public Employees Federation (PEF) member who works across the street from Fiterman, raised concerns about its plans.

The plans for Fiterman seem [they] will be repaired, which strongly suggests [they were] bro- ken,” he told Clarion. The fire de- partment inspected the standpipes the next day, and found them in working order. When Clarion asked how long since September 11, 2001, Fiterman’s standpipes had been bro- ken, CUNY spokesperson Arena de- nied to respond.

INSPECTIONS?

The October 2 meeting was told that FDNY will conduct regular in- spections at Fiterman — an issue in the Deutsche Bank fire, which had not been inspected for years. Clarion asked for the date of the most re- cent FDNY inspection of Fiterman prior to the Deutsche Bank fire but again Arena declined to respond.

The Deutsche Bank fire also high- lighted the lack of a meaningful community notification plan. Resi- dents said while smoke poured out of the building authorities did not in- form them whether to stay indoors or leave the area. They were sharply critical on the notification issue, as they have been raising it for years with no clear answer.

Responsibility for emergency management and community notifi- cation at both Deutsche Bank and Fiterman rests with the City’s Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Since the August fire, City officials have promised better plans, and OEM said it is beginning to look in to high-tech solutions such as cell phone text messages.

NONCOMMITTAL

At the October 2 meeting, CUNY of- ficials discussed creation of a commu- nity notification e-mail list, but were noncommittal when asked about au- tomatic phone calls or low-tech op- tions like an emergency siren. Plans for the Fiterman project completed last March call for emergency drills at BMCC, but PSC Chapter Chair Jane Young told Clarion that no such drills have been held. Young said that em- ployees and students at BMCC still have little idea what they would be ex- pected to do in an emergency.

PSC members and their allies said they will continue to insist on ac- countability from CUNY, its contrac- tors and government agencies.

“We’ve been very involved,” Young told Clarion. She was elected to the Fiterman Hall Community Advisory Committee, and she said the chapter raises Fiterman questions at labor management meetings. “They’re conscious that we’re conscious,” she said. Young said the PSC is also con- tinuing its work in the WTC Commu- nity and Labor Coalition, which includes NYCOSH and members of Community Board One (CBO).

“It is only when the community and workers come together,” CB1 member Catherine McVay Hugh- es told Clarion, that officials will respond.
Welfare Fund announces new long-term care program

Help for daily life in advanced age

The Welfare Fund is bringing members a one-time, limited opportunity: a new long-term care insurance plan is being offered to active employees, and those younger than 70 years of age can purchase it regardless of their medical condition. This plan has been specially designed for our members with a top-rated insurer and at very competitive prices.

WHAT’S NEW

• Wider scope of employees covered
• Easier to qualify for benefits
• Longer period of coverage
• More flexible benefits (i.e., alternate forms of care)
• Better protections against loss of coverage

The new insurance will be made available to active employees working for the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund.

Phase 1: All members who are not currently enrolled in the Welfare Fund’s long-term care program under John Hancock will receive a mailing in the fall of 2007, announcing the opportunity to enroll in the new plan. All WF members and all others in the PSC bargaining unit and their spouses and dependent children are eligible to purchase this long-term care policy. Active full-time employees (as well as adjuncts in their third consecutive semester and teaching six or more credit hours, and hourly employees working 17 to 22 hours per week) who are younger than 70 years old at the end of 2007 will be able to enroll without question of insurability. All other eligible members and dependents may be required to provide medical information in order to obtain a policy. Any member who does not receive a mailing should contact the WF or John Hancock.

Phase 2: All people who currently have a policy with John Hancock will receive a mailing in the spring of 2008, explaining that they may stay with their current policy or join the new program. For this group, premiums for the new program will be calculated on an individual basis, reflecting the amount of past premium payments. Adjusted personnel who don’t meet phase I criteria noted above will also receive this mailing.

DEDUCTED FROM PAY

As in the past, premiums for long-term care insurance will be fully paid by those who elect coverage. Premiums are generally deducted from payroll or pension checks and forwarded to the insurance carrier. The Welfare Fund is cost-neutral in this equation, neither funding the benefit, nor receiving any subsidy or commission from the insurance carrier. The Fund does help develop and monitor the program and provides participants with informational and advocacy support.

Once a person signs up for coverage, a rate is set which does not increase over the years (unless coverage is voluntarily increased). That rate is determined by age at enrollment and the maximum daily benefit.

GHI OPTIONAL RIDER

The annual transfer period for making changes in your health benefits will occur this year during the month of November. The forms needed to make a change are available from your college benefits office.

For full-time CUNY employees, the transfer period for changes in basic health insurance coverage will run from November 1 through December 15, with changes in full-timers’ dental coverage, this year’s transfer period is from October 29 through November 11.

For part-time CUNY employees, the 2007 health insurance transfer period is from October 29 through November 10.

Retirees can make changes only during the transfer period of even-numbered years, so they will next be able to change their basic health insurance coverage in the Fall of 2008.

Wider Scope of Covered Persons: This is the only program to our knowledge that affords qualified adjuncts the benefit of guaranteed issue.

Tuez Qualification: This program (as well as certain others) qualifies for special tax treatment. There is every likelihood that you consider, with your tax adviser, of course, that premium costs will be tax-deductible on federal returns and, for New York State tax filers, premium costs may be directly offset gross adjusted income.

Return of Premium on Death: Those who die prior to age 75, it also serves as a minor but substantive form of life insurance.

The next day, nooses were hung on the tree in question and a noose was also adjusted by white students. Cour said, “The designation of a ‘gorilla’ had been incorporated into the discussion with John Hancock that no medical evidence of insurability will be required for active full-time employees younger than 70 years of age – either within 60 days of initial hire or during this initial offering from October 29, 2007, through December 15, 2007. This is called “guaranteed issue,” and it means that the same coverage at the same premium (based on age and choice of benefit level) will be offered to all applicants without consideration of past or current medical condition.

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GHI OPTIONAL RIDER

The annual transfer period is allowed when the participant can make the change options available with the particular basic health insurance plan. CUNY employees enrolled in the GHI-CRB health insurance program may want to consider the GHI Optional Rider, which has proven very popular among PSC members.

The GHI Optional Rider significantly reduces the cost of using out-of-network doctors for GHI participants. The cost is $2.79 per pay period (an individual, or $7.02 for a family rate effective on 7/1/2007).

Those who sign up for the GHI Optional Rider get more than higher reimbursements from the basic carrier (GHI). In addition, those with the rider are charged a lower premium by the Welfare Fund’s Extended Medical Benefit. With the GHI Optional Rider, an eligible participant must reach a deductible level of $1,000 per individual (up to a maximum of $2,000 per family) before this major medical benefit starts to pay. Without the optional GHI Optional Rider, the deductible is $4,000 (to a maximum of $8,000 per family).

AF: Jena 6 solidarity

AFT Vice President Nat LaCour said, “The designation of a ‘white tree’ on a public school campus and the display of such violent symbols of hatred as nooses hanging from a tree can be tolerated in our society.” One of the convictions of the Jena 6 was overturned; the other five have not been tried, and charges were reduced since the protests began.

After more than a year without a contract, some teachers in New Orleans Public Schools have their right to bargain collectively restored, United Teachers of New Orleans (UTNO) President Barbara Minckler announced. But as a result of post-Katrina restructuring of the NO public school system, faculty and staff who work at Recovery School District schools and charter schools continue to be excluded. UTNO pledged to continue its fight to represent them as they begin contract negotiations.

AFT: Jena 6 solidarity

On September 28, some 15,000 people marched in Jena to demand justice for the “Jena 6,” young African Americans charged with attempted murder after a high school fight in December 2006. The march in Jena was augmented by local demonstrations across the country, and the AFT issued a statement calling them “victims of judicial inequality and an overzealous prosecutor” and expressing concern about the fairness of their upholding.

In the fall of 2006, black students at Jena’s high school sat under a tree which until then had been ex- clusively claimed by white stu- dents. The next day, nooses were hung on the tree in question and off-campus attacks on black stu- dents followed.

By LARRY MORGAN
Executive Director, PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund

IN BRIEF

IN BRIEF

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Phase 2: All people who currently have a policy with John Hancock will receive a mailing in the spring of 2008, explaining that they may stay with their current policy or join the new program. For this group, premiums for the new program will be calculated on an individual basis, reflecting the amount of past premium payments. Adjusted personnel who don’t meet phase I criteria noted above will also receive this mailing.

DEDUCTED FROM PAY

As in the past, premiums for long-term care insurance will be fully paid by those who elect coverage. Premiums are generally deducted from payroll or pension checks and forwarded to the insurance carrier. The Welfare Fund is cost-neutral in this equation, neither funding the benefit, nor receiving any subsidy or commission from the insurance carrier. The Fund does help develop and monitor the program and provides participants with informational and advocacy support.

Once a person signs up for coverage, a rate is set which does not increase over the years (unless cover- age is voluntarily increased). That rate is determined by age at enrollment and the maximum daily bene- fit selected. Since this rate – not sur- prisingly – increases with age of enrollment, each year’s delay in- creases the premium you will pay if you sign up at a later date.

More importantly, we have a one-time-only arrangement with John Hancock that no medical evidence of insurability will be required for ac- tive full-time employees younger than 70 years of age – either within 60 days of initial hire or during this initial offering from October 29, 2007, through December 15, 2007. This is called “guaranteed issue,” and it means that the same coverage at the same premium (based on age and choice of benefit level) will be offered to all appli- cants without consideration of past or current medical condition.

GUARANTEED ISSUE

This does not mean that others – outside of full-time active employ- ees under 70 – will be denied cover- age. It only means that the insurance company is entitled to evaluate their “insurability.”

In addition to providing indemnui-}
Graduation rates in real time

By PAUL ATTEWELL and DAVID LAFIN
CUNY Graduate Center

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ndergraduate enrollments have grown sixfold in the US in the last half-century and continue to boom; today more than 80% of high-school graduates go to college within approximately eight years of graduation. One might expect those accomplishments to be celebrated, but the expansion of higher education has been accompanied by ambivalence, anxiety and opposition. As enrollments continue to climb, the intensity of criticism grows ever louder. We are told that public colleges admit inadequately prepared students, that graduation rates are scandalously low, that students take too long to graduate and that university graduates lack appropriate job skills. Last fall’s report by Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings’ Commission on the Future of Higher Education followed suit in calling for more institutional accountability for what students learn and for graduating them faster and at less cost.

Many of the questions policy-makers ask are distorted by conceptual blinders that evaluate today’s undergraduate experience against a norm from an earlier era when young students entered college immediately after high school, attended college full time, lived in dormitories and rarely worked for pay because they were financially dependent on their parents. But such traditional students, whose needs and experiences still drive public policy, make up less than a quarter of today’s undergraduate population. We need to focus on what higher education is, not what it once was.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF STUDENT

It should come as no surprise that today’s undergraduates – often commuter students who typically juggle family or work obligations, or both, with college – do not fare well on performance measures designed for a different kind of student. Today many undergraduates cycle in and out of college. They stop for a while or drop down to part-time status to earn enough money to pay for next semester's tuition, or for rent, or to have a child, or to accept a promising job opportunity. For such students – remember, they are the majority of today’s undergraduates – a college education is something that has to be squeezed into the rest of life. College is no longer a phase of youth to be enjoyed before real life begins.

That became all too clear to us in the course of our long-term study of female college students and their children. We followed the women who entered the City University of New York system from 1970 to 1972, as CUNY campuses began accepting all New York City high-school graduates. It took the students we tracked a long time to complete their degrees, but 30 years after entering college, 70% of women who had attended CUNY colleges had earned a degree, and more than three-fourths of those had earned a bachelor’s degree. In parallel analyses we conducted of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, which until 2000 tracked students nationwide for 20 years, we found that the graduation rate was 61%. Even among the weakest prospects – students who entered college with high-school averages of C or cent government data indicate that more than 28% of bachelor’s degree recipients get their degrees more than six years after entering college. Women, members of minority groups and poor students tend to take longer than the average.

Despite delayed graduation, college makes a big difference in the lives of working-class students and their children. Two findings stand out. First, despite a huge increase in the college-educated population, the value of a degree has not eroded over time. For women, in particular, it has grown. While the students we studied who entered college with poor preparation or economic disadvantages did not earn as much as straight-A or middle-class colleagues, poorly prepared students who attended college nevertheless earned 13% more annually than students from similar backgrounds who went no further than high school graduation.

Moreover, after controlling for IQ, high-school performance and family background, we found that even students who attended college but failed to graduate earned significantly more than their counterparts who never attended college. Thus when high school counselors encourage their poor or academically weak students to aim for college, they are not misleading them.

NEXT GENERATION BENEFITS

Second, an important but underappreciated benefit of higher education is the impact that college attendance has upon the life chances of the next generation. We discovered that when mothers from poor and working-class backgrounds went to college, they changed the way they raised their children. Their educational expectations for their children climbed and their style of interacting with them was affected, compared with similar women who never attended college.

College mothers became more involved in their children’s schools and turned into advocates for the kids. They took their children to museums, zoos and theaters, or provided other forms of cultural enrichment. They involved themselves more in community and church groups. In combination, such parental activities associated with maternal college attendance improved their children’s educational performance, whether measured by test scores or chances of college entry. In short, maternal college-going interrupts the cycle of poverty.

NOT UNALLOYED SUCCESS

The picture that our research uncovered was not one of unalloyed success. The disadvantaged more than equivalent students who failed to stretch across generations, so that children of minority and poor mothers who attended college were less likely to succeed educationally than children of white and affluent mothers. College access did not erase disadvantages for everyone. On average, however, we found that maternal college-going had a significant positive impact on the prospects for the second generation among various disadvantaged groups.

If we are to have accountability and benchmarks for higher education, then let us measure what matters for our society: the long-term impact of educational access upon college students and their offspring. Adopting measurement systems that count disadvantages for everyone and longer to graduate will inevitably make those institutions that serve working-class and minority students appear inefficient, while ensuring that colleges that enroll more-affluent students look highly productive. That is not accountability or fiscal prudence; it is an excuse for further cuts in financing for public universities and camouflage for reversing past gains in access to college.

Instead, we should concentrate on the aspects of educational policy that stack the deck against disadvantaged students. Although our study documented the success of many of those students, we also saw the obstacles they faced:

- Skyrocketing tuition at public universities that makes college less affordable for working-class and middle-class students alike. In the last 30 years, the percentage of the costs of attending a public four-year college covered by Pell Grants has fallen by nearly one-half, which means the pressure on poor students.

- Punishing reductions in government aid for students who work their way through college. Part-time students are made ineligible for certain kinds of assistance, yet financial stress pushes students to take fewer credits to accommodate longer work hours. When economically stressed students drop out of college to earn money to meet tuition, their temporarily increased earnings reduce their aid eligibility for the following year. It’s a Catch-22.

- Federal requirements that all college students be dependent on their parents until they are roughly 23 years old, thus reducing their aid. That is unrealistic for students from poorer families who have been financially self-supporting since their late teens. They can’t or won’t take money from their struggling parents (if anything, their parents may ask for their assistance), while they soldier on with grossly inadequate aid.

We can cling to an increasingly unrepresentative image of undergraduate life and document through statistical measures that universities filled with working-class and minority students do not live up to that privileged benchmark. Or we can acknowledge the emergence of a system of mass higher education and develop policies that recognize that college-going has profoundly changed.

Paul Attewel and David Lavin are professors of sociology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and co-authors, with Thurston Domina and Tania Levey, of Next Generation Benefits: College-going to Disadvantaged Pay Off Across the Generations? (Russell Sage Foundation, 2007). This article first appeared in the Chronicle of Higher Education.
**CONTRACT FIGHT**

19 reasons to come to the mass meeting

By BARBARA BOWEN

PSC President

O

n Tuesday, October 30 at 6:00 pm, the PSC is holding a mass member-ship meeting in the Great Hall of Cooper Union in Manhat-

tan. Why should you come?

1. Come for yourself. Come to the meeting because the experience of being in one of the most beautiful rooms in New York City with a thousand other people who want the same changes you want is not to be missed.

2. Come to the mass meeting because this round of negotiations is a contest between two radically different agendas for CUNY. Management wants a workplace where we have no annual salary steps and instead have to please the president to get an in-

crease. Management wants department chairs out of the union. It relies on conti-
gent faculty and staff, less academic free-
dom. Management wants to slash job security for HEOs. (Details of the demands are on the PSC website.) These management demands have nothing to do with the re-

quirements of the City and the State; they are purely CUNY’s agenda. Come to the meeting if that’s not the university you want.

3. Come to the meeting because numbers matter. In the last two contract campaigns, every single time we held a large rally, CUNY moved. If we fill the Great Hall at Cooper Union to bursting as we did two years ago with the union’s power at the bargain-

ing table will increase. Naturally, Matt Gold-

stein says that demonstrations don’t matter and what counts is “reasoned discourse” at the bargaining table, but the facts tell a dif-

ter story. The union bargaining team also believes in productive discussions, but what counts is power, and a huge turnout at the mass meeting shows we have it.

4. Come to the meeting to hear directly from the union bargaining team the latest developments at the bargaining table – and the politics behind those developments. By October 30 there may be significant move-

ment in negotiations with statewide unions; come and hear what that means for us.

5. Come to Cooper Union to launch the union’s campaign to push management’s dangerous demands off the table. Starting October 30, we will work with you to force management to drop their anti-faculty, anti-

staff, anti-adjunct, anti-student, anti-tenure, anti-academic freedom demands. Come to the meeting to find out how to be part of this campaign.

6. Come to the union meeting to hear a dis-

cussion of the PSC’s strategy to wage more than a defensive campaign. Another austerity set-

tlement will do nothing to reverse the ero-

sion of CUNY salaries or improve our working conditions; we need a non-austerity contract. But how do we achieve that with City, State and CUNY lined up behind the “pattern” – the anti-worker doctrine that all public employee unions must accept the same settlement, too often below the level of inflation? What can one union do against this system? Or are we really alone? Come for an honest discussion of who the PSC’s allies are in this fight, how we plan to mobilize them and what you can do.

7. Come to Cooper Union, even if you have never come to a union event before, because this round of bargaining is different. In the last two union contracts, the PSC/bargaining team – with the strong support of the membership – was able to achieve some changes many peo-

ple thought impossible for CUNY – well-paid sabbaticals and junior faculty leave, paid of-

fice hours for adjuncts, 100 new full-time facul-

ty positions. But reversing 30 years of salary erosion is a different matter; it requires an even larger financial package. How do we make progress on this difficult issue? Come to the meeting to find out.

8. Come to the mass meeting if it matters to you that many of us have seen CUNY salaries lose up to 40% of their real value over the course of our own careers. Increasingly, we are finding that our salaries simply do not buy what they once provided. The latest bitter irony is that many of us are having trouble sending our own children to college. Mean-

while CUNY departments cannot recruit the new faculty they need and are beginning to lose their senior and mid career faculty. As a result of the PSC’s advocacy, there is starting to be some serious political support for restor-

ing CUNY salaries; come to hear how you can add your voice to this effort.

9. Come to be visible. Nothing tells us more about the importance of our making ourselves visible than Chancellor Goldstein’s refusal to be photographed receiving the union petition bearing 5,534 names. As someone who careful-

ly controls his image, Goldstein knows that a picture of his receiving so many thousands of signatures against his agenda for CUNY would disrupt his message of a faculty and staff-tooled with his leadership and support-

ive of his plans. Come in large numbers to the Cooper Union meeting so the real views of the membership cannot be effaced.

10. Come to the union meeting if you be-

lieve that CUNY’s mistreatment of half of its students is worth fighting. Many of us find it unacceptable to be bombarded with sub-

way ads about a few terrific people teaching at CUNY while we know that more than half the courses are taught by underpaid, under-

supported, under-respected adjuncts. If CUNY can get away with mistreating this large a part of its labor force, all of us are un-

dermined. Come to hear how the union is or-

ganizing for change.

11. Come on October 30 if you believe we are entitled to good healthcare benefits, a manageable workload and basic human rights such as a safe workplace and paid parental leave. These are real issues at stake in this round of negotiations; only by working in a strategic, organized way can we win them. Find out how.

12. Come to find out what you can do in what may be a historic fight for public higher education in New York City. With the inade-

quacy of our salaries reaching a crisis point, and the adjunct system shortchanging everyone, this may be the moment for signifi-

cant change. To be effective, the PSC has to be at least as well organized as the forces op-

posing us; at the mass meeting you will hear how the union is building its base and how even a modest amount of effort by each per-

son will magnify this work.

13. Come on October 30 because the New York State Higher Education Commission plans to release its preliminary report this fall. The commission’s findings are likely to set the agenda for the next round of negotiations. The New York State Higher Education Commission plans to release its preliminary report this fall. The commission’s findings are likely to set the agenda for the next round of negotiations. But how do we achieve that with City, State and CUNY lined up behind the “pattern” – the anti-worker doctrine that all public employee unions must accept the same settlement, too often below the level of inflation? What can one union do against this system? Or are we really alone? Come for an honest discussion of who the PSC’s allies are in this fight, how we plan to mobilize them and what you can do.

14. Come to support the negotiating team. In the first round of negotiations, the union barga-

ning team logged more than 600 hours of meetings together. That number doubled in the next round. Not just full-time union offi-

cers and legal advisors, but faculty and staff like you have a crucial role in this round of negotiations. The Union’s allies in this fight, how we plan to mobilize them and what you can do.

15. Come to the Union meeting to place yourself in history. People sit at meet-

ings in this room in 1862 and heard Abraham Lincoln make one of the most important speeches of his life; in 1962 he wanted the New York State Higher Education Commission to release its preliminary report. He was in 1862 heard Frederick Douglass call for imme-

diate emancipation. When New Yorkers have gathered to organize for women’s rights, black rights, gay and lesbian rights, and abortion and freedom, they have often gathered in this room.

16. Come on October 30 because you didn’t come to the mass meeting in 2005 and you’ve been sorry ever since.

17. Come on October 30 because you did not come to the mass meeting in 2005 and you wouldn’t dream of missing this one.

18. Come if you want a future at CUNY, if you think the future of CUNY is worth fight-

ing for. Come to Cooper Union if you refuse to accept that our students deserve a less se-

rious education than the children of the rich – just because they are predominantly work-

ing class and people of color. Come if you be-

ieve another university is possible.

19. Come to the union meeting if you believe that real power is in the hands of people organizing for change. Come if you haven’t given up on the idea that intellectuals can contribute to pub-

clic life. Come if you believe in standing up for your rights and the rights of your students. Come if you want to experience, at least for one night, an alternative to the culture of commercialism, individualism and political despair that surrounds us. Come if you have anger, but also come if you have hope.
PUBLIC RELATIONS, PUBLIC FUNDING

‘Look Who’s Teaching at CUNY’

By ELLEN BALLEISEN
Bronx Community College

W

hen I saw the first “Look Who’s Teaching at CUNY!” advertisement on the subway, it didn’t make a big impression. But within a few weeks I saw several more on subways and on buses, followed by a full-page ad in the New York Times. And with each additional sight-

buses, followed by a full-page ad in the New
York Times. And with each additional sight-
ing, I found myself growing angry.

There were a lot of reasons, but let’s start with one. In April, everyone in the CUNY building where I work was forced to evacuate when a giant sinkhole opened up outside the front door, big enough to hold a Volk-
swagen. We were back in the building the following day but as of press time, the sink-
hole is still there. It’s surrounded by a fence with a sign that says, “Work in Progress” – but in six months, I’ve seen no work and no progress.

Every time I saw another “Look Who’s Teaching...” ad, I wondered how much this campaign must cost. Was this really the best way to spend CUNY’s available funds?

I wasn’t the only person with questions about this expensive public relations blitz. Kenneth Ryesky, an adjunct assistant pro-

fessor at Queens College, used the Freedom of Information Act to obtain CUNY docu-
ments on the cost of the ad campaign. Those records showed that for bus and subway ads, print ads in a variety of publications and ca-

ble TV commercials in March and April, CUNY spent $780,180.

But the records turned over by CUNY weren’t complete. They didn’t include two full-page ads in The New York Times – which, according to the Times’ ad rates, would have cost about $118,000. And since the “Look Who’s Teaching...” campaign has run long past April, it’s safe to assume that the price tag is now well over $1 million and possibly two or three times that amount.

When Ryesky posted his discoveries on an e-mail discussion group I belong to, I began ex-
amining my angry response to the campaign. Was it just about money? That was certainly part of it, but it wasn’t the whole story.

In fact, I don’t have a problem with CUNY trumpeting the achievements of the individ-

uals featured in the ad campaign. I’m a big

fan of Billy Collins’s poetry, I like John Corigliano’s music and I’ve read many of Gregory Rabassa’s translations with plea-
sure. I do want the general public to know that CUNY has professors with worldwide reputations.

But I don’t want the public to think that everything’s just wonderful at CUNY or that it’s only the distinguished professors who are worth recognizing. The University has thousands of faculty – adjuncts, full-timers and continuing education teachers – who do not have international reputations but who work extremely hard, day in and day out, un-
der conditions that border on the impossible.

I’ve heard some adjuncts suggest an alter-

nate ad campaign called “Look Who’s Teach-
ing Most of the Classes at CUNY.” According to CUNY’s own statistics, 59% of the faculty consists of adjuncts. These part-time faculty earn as little as $2,500 per course. How about “See What’s Crumbling at CUNY”? There’s no shortage of photo ops for that campaign. Besides the sinkhole at Bronx Community College, it might include CUNY’s Marshak Building – which is literally falling down, its decaying concrete held up only by an external skeleton of rusting I-beams.

But as that fly on the wall, I don’t hear these administrators talking about drawing the public’s attention to CUNY’s long-term loss of public dollars, which is the root cause of adjunct exploitation, overworked profes-

sional staff, deferred maintenance and packed classes.

A better image should not be sought merely for its own sake. Any PR campaign should have the message that CUNY has many wonderful professors and instructors but needs more financial support to fulfill its edu-

cational mission.

The crumbling infrastructure, reliance on underpaid adjuncts, low wages for full-
timers and crowded classes aren’t news to all of us who work for CUNY. But this infor-

mation isn’t common knowledge, even among New Yorkers who closely follow local news. It’s the University administration’s job to get the word out that public higher educa-

tion in the City is of great value and that it urgently needs greater support.

University leaders elsewhere in the US are doing just that. For example, the president of Metropolitan State College in Denver, Col-

orado, just wrote an op-ed titled “Stop Starv-
ing Our Urban Public Universities.”

If that were part of the message of “Look Who’s Teaching at CUNY!” then I might find the campaign more worthwhile. But there’s no way to justify a taxpayer-funded institu-
tion spending more than a million bucks to give itself a pat on the back.

Why tell only part of CUNY’s story?