THE STORY BEHIND YOUR RAISE

PSC members’ salaries go up on October 20, rising by at least 3% for all. Those who are already on the top step of an annual salary schedule will receive a larger increase, for a total raise this month of 6.1% to 8.75%. These raises didn’t happen because CUNY was feeling generous. They are the result of PSC members’ joint efforts to win a fair contract, against often stiff resistance from CUNY management. From petitions to TV ads to picket lines, union members did more than complain – they took action. And the results are about to show up in your paycheck.

BUDGET
Paterson seeks CUNY cuts
Gov. Paterson is asking for a midyear cut of $53 million to CUNY’s budget.

GRAD RATES
Student persistence and college success
Using the wrong yardstick to measure success makes it easy to lose sight of the real achievements of students and faculty at public colleges. And that can lead to bad policy decisions, narrowing access to higher education.

LIFE/WORK
Helping students heal, finding truth in fiction
Annecy Báez helps students find their way through difficult emotional waters. Director of counseling at Lehman, she’s also an award-winning writer of short fiction – and she says that art and healing are closely connected.

STRIKE VOTE
Determined to win a fair agreement
CUNY Research Foundation management has spent half a million dollars a year on a union-busting law firm, and gave the RF president a 44% raise. What it hasn’t done is offer a fair contract to its employees, who last month felt compelled to authorize a strike.
Response & Race & Employment at CUNY

In 1942 one of Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s first acts as New York's first black City Councilman was to introduce a resolution against color discrimination on the faculties of the four major city colleges. He wanted the Council to question the colleges' presidents about the fact that of the 2,282 full-time faculty positions, none were held by African Americans. A scholar that Powell recommended to the presidents, who became City College's first permanent black professor, was Kenneth B. Clark, one of America's most distinguished psychologists.

The composition of the profession, and the systematic underrepresentation of African Americans, should be matched by the attention to the recruitment and retention of faculty and staff. As co-coordinators of the PSC Executive Council’s Anti-Racism Committee, we would like to bring to the attention of members who may not know, and remind others, that the PSC has recently made the examination of race at CUNY one of its strategic priorities.

The Anti-Racism Committee, with the help of an advisory group of faculty and professional staff, has identified hiring practices and the status of affirmative action as our initial areas of study. We are planning an extensive inquiry to take place this academic year, combining analysis of official data with members’ testimonies and reports gathered in campus visits.

We will report on our activities regularly at the Delegate Assembly. If members are interested in participating in this work, please contact Naomi Zauderer at the PSC (nzauderer@pscmail.org) or either of us (bbaum@bway.net or jpittman@lehman.cuny.edu).

Jonathan Buchsbaum, Queens College
& John Pittman, John Jay College

New AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka calls for stricter regulation of the financial industry during a September 22 speech outside the New York Stock Exchange.

“We need a different model for our economy, where good jobs, not bad debts, drive our growth,” Trumka said.
CUNY still lags on flu preparation

Flu season is fast approaching, but PSC activists say CUNY continues to show little sense of urgency in preparing for a possible outbreak of the H1N1 virus. Union officials have spent approximately $500,000 of their own money to hire Nixon Peabody, a union-busting law firm. They described the volunteer stand against management proposals that would effectively cut their real wages.

Though closely linked to CUNY, the foundation is a private-sector entity and is not therefore covered by the Taylor Law, a State statute that prohibits public-sector employees from going on strike. No strike date has been set yet.

The foundation’s hardline stance comes at a time when its bottom line is healthy, they have hired a half-dozen new employees over the past several months, and as of October 5, their website announced that they had received $23 million in federal stimulus funding this year.

The vote was the culmination of an organizing process that has seen the 84 members of the RF bargaining unit gradually build their capacity for collective action.

CUNY’s 17 undergraduate colleges are a focus of concern as places where thousands of people congregate on a daily basis. A recent survey of seven CUNY institutions from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommended that employers modify normal sick leave policies this flu season is part of a growing debate on the link between sick leave and public health. On October 1, hundreds of mostly immigrant workers affiliated with Make the Road New York marched on City Hall in support of legislation to guarantee workers in New York City one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked, or up to nine paid sick days per year if they work for a large or medium-sized business. (Workers would become eligible after working for an employer for 90 days.) The measure has 38 cosponsors but has yet to receive the support of Mayor Michael Bloomberg or City Council Speaker Christine Quinn.

Guidelines for higher education institutions from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommend that employers modify normal sick leave policy to reduce flu transmission, and encourage employees to stay home when they feel ill. In late August, the PSC asked CUNY to consider advancing sick leave if an employee would otherwise be forced to go off payroll. The union also urged that employees’ leave time not be charged if campuses are closed or classes cancelled.

Part-time faculty who contract swine flu could face a particular bind. CUNY adjuncts can miss no more than 1/15th of their assigned hours worked, or up to nine paid sick days while teaching a course, and are not allowed to accrue sick days from one semester to the next.

RF workers held a one-hour walkout on September 14.

Worker involvement is key to a healthy workplace.

Kullach described the virus as still being relatively mild but capable of much worse when it lands in congregate settings. "We need to be preparing for the worst," Kullach said. "We don’t know what will come around the corner." As of September 25, more than 27,000 college students had come down with swine flu this semester, according to the American College Health Association, and at least three have died.

PREVENTION

Bill Kojolla, an industrial hygienist with the AFL-CIO, noted that protocols would increase by 5% this flu season, according to the CDC, OSHA, the Department of Education and other government agencies were just that: recommendations. Employers who flout the guidelines are not penalized, Kojolla said.

"We’re going to have to be the muscle that gets our employer prepared and prepared now," he told union activists. "Worker involvement is key to getting that health and safety plan adopted." Greenbaum agrees. "If you see problems on your campus — a lack of soap, hot water or towels in the bathrooms, absence of hand sanitizer, or a lack of clean hand-washing facilities — contact your chapter chair and the PSC’s Health and Safety Watchdogs," she advised. "The union’s Health and Safety Committee can be reached at hswatchdogs@pscmail.org. At meetings this fall, committee members will be distributing copies of a short, accessible guide to swine flu prevention published by the American Federation of Teachers."
Supporters mobilize to save good union jobs

In July workers at the Stella D’oro bakery in the Bronx won an important victory in their bitter 11-month strike with a decision in their favor from the National Labor Relations Board. Workers are fighting to keep Stella’s jobs in the Bronx.

Lance plans to close Stella’s iconic factory on 237th and Broadway on October 15, after it was unable to make concessions in the long-running dispute. Workers and their supporters have fought back with a flurry of activity to try and stop the move, including urging New York City officials to halt the sale and preserving some of Lance’s largest investors in order to draw their support from the company.

On September 25, 400 Stella supporters rallied outside the Wall Street headquarters of Goldman Sachs, one of Lance’s largest shareholders, and then marched on City Hall. Noting that Brynwood Partners had received $425,000 in tax abatements to upgrade machinery since purchasing Stella D’oro in 2006, they said Mayor Bloomberg and the city’s Department of Finance should seek a temporary restraining order to prevent the factory’s machinery from being shipped to Ohio.

“This portrait conveys the sense of vulnerability and compassion," the judges said. "It really admirer the people I wrote about, and people like them," said Rajendra who became the PSC communications coordinator in August 2008. “I admire their courage in telling their stories. If we can win health reform this year, it will be because of them.”

For its work in 2008, Clarion has again won a range of local and national labor journalism awards.

The International Labor Communications Association (ILCA), which represents labor media throughout the US and Canada, gave its top award to former Clarion Associate Editor Dania Rajendra. The ILCA’s Max Steineck Award, for the writer of “the best labor story of the year,” went to Rajendra for her article, “At CUNY, Adjunct Health Care Is Broken,” published in Clarion’s March 2008 issue.

Rajendra’s article “used the stories and voices of her union’s members to illustrate the arbitrary cruelty of the system,” the judges said. Her solid reporting, they wrote, brought light to “disturbing and heart-wrenching stories – the teacher who paid substitutes out of her own pocket when she was too sick from chemotherapy, so she wouldn’t lose her benefits; the teacher who continued answering student e-mails despite a broken arm; the teacher who had to borrow money to cover her COBRA costs while out of work receiving a kidney transplant.”

“RIPPLE EFFECT”

The factory’s closure would affect the jobs of the 160 people who work in the factory (both union members and administrative staff), as well as the 60 workers who transport raw materials and finished product to and from the plant. The economic pain would then ripple through the local shops and stores that the workers patronize.

“Any time a factory closes anywhere it’s a blow to the community around it,” said Lenny Dick, a math teacher and union activist. “People like our grandparents built the unions up and now these guys are dismantling them.” The Bronx has the highest unemployment of the five boroughs, with its official unemployment rate currently at 13.2%.

Niki McDaniel, an associate professor of biology at BCC, at the factory running in the Bronx, but that Brynwood would not discuss their offers. “The employer just refuses to talk to anyone,” Nikolaidis said. “Anyone associated with us is treated like they have the bubonic plague.”

“Bloomberg keeps preaching about how the unions are destroying his factory’s momentum. He doesn’t care. Bloomberg keeps preaching about saving jobs for the unions, but he don’t do nothing,” Caceras said. “How is he going to create jobs?” Filipoupo demanded. “He keeps losing jobs in New York and he don’t do nothing.”

Protesters ask ‘Where is Bloomberg?’

Nikolaidis estimates that Stella D’oro owes its 136 unionized employees about $1.5 million in severance pay and another $1.5 million in back pay from the strike, as well as another $12 million in pension and health care fund liabilities. As protests continued when about 200 demonstrators gathered outside the Stella D’oro factory on October 2. Among those who turned out were Victor Caceres and Ray Rosario of the RF-CUNY Central Office, which is in the midst of a long-running contract fight (see page 3). “We want to show solidarity with them,” Caceres said. “Workers have been under the gun, taken advantage of the last two decades. We need to turn this around and have respect for working people.”

Owe it to them

Beth Borzone, a high school social studies teacher from Long Island, said the tenacity of the Stella D’oro workers inspired her to make the two-hour drive into the city to show her support.

“Many more birthday parties or family gatherings have we set around, eating Stella D’oro cookies?” she asked. “They have brought joy to many, many people for decades. And now their jobs are threatened because some greedy venture capitalists in Connecticut who produce nothing of value. They strip other businesses so they can sell them for a profit, benefiting who? A small few. That’s not promoting the general welfare. That is not the goal that was written in our Constitution.”

As Clarion went to press, the union and its supporters were organizing an October 8 protest at City Hall. (For updates, see www.stelladorostrike.com.)
Coping with crowded classrooms
Clarion’s Roving Reporter talks with members at BMCC

SAAVIK FORD
Assistant professor, astronomy

Science classes are perpetually over-stuffed. We have a regular class cap of 27 – but labs have 24 seats in them and equipment for 24 students. In part due to the economic downturn, people are a lot more motivated to stay in school. Now I have two sections with 27 students still in them, still coming every week – and I have 24 seats. I have to add an extra person to three of the tables, they sit at the end and watch everyone else, maybe take a couple of notes. It’s standard school policy to register 27 students for classes with 24 lab seats, on the grounds that ‘we always have students who drop.’ But you’ve got four or five weeks right at the beginning when students are supposed to be learning foundational stuff, and if you’ve got too many students in the lab, they’re missing that learning experience.

TOM BURGESS
Adjunct lecturer, anthropology

I’ve heard there are fewer night classes and weekend classes, because there’s less enrollment from students working during the day. We have an increase in students in the daytime classes, presumably because a lot of people lost their jobs and now they can take the daytime classes. Consequently the administration has been packing more students into very small classrooms. We have mostly small classrooms that can fit about 25 people comfortably, and we have up to 40 people pushed in. This semester I have two classes with only 37, and I consider that a relief because usually I have 40. Other people have told me that they have a lot more in their classes than usual. When it’s too crowded, my solution is to just give multiple-choice tests, it’s the only way to keep up.

EUGENIE BIETRY
Adjunct lecturer, economics

I’ve been teaching for over 15 years, so I have experience with large classes. My classes are always pretty packed – economics is very popular. I’ve got the same number of students I always do, close to 40. More people are enrolling in the school, but we can’t put too many in a class because we won’t be able to teach the students properly. If the class gets too big, I could lose them – a waste of all of our resources. I need to be able to pay attention to individual students, to know what their problems are. My students have to turn in homework frequently – forcing them to get used to studying on a regular basis. I’ll take points off if homework is late or doesn’t arrive. And if I think something isn’t explained well in the book, I’ll put supplemental material up on Blackboard. But I also have the advantage of a group of students who really want to learn.

GEOFF KURTZ
Assistant professor, American government

I’m teaching two classes and they’re both writing-intensive. The administration actually respects the cap on writing-intensive classes. I’ve heard horror stories from other colleagues this semester, but mine are capped at 25. But I’ve never taught a class that wasn’t up to the cap number by the end of the registration, and it really is too many. When I was in grad school at Rutgers, their writing classes were capped at 22 students. Most people thought that was a lot, 22. Twenty-five is about 10% more than that. It means that I can’t give as much individual feedback to the students. Students actually seem appreciative of any comments at all, though – anything more than just the grade. For so many, all their other classes are big, and their other professors don’t even have as much room as I do to respond to individual students’ drafts and essays.

LESLEY RENNIS
Associate professor, health education

All of my classes have about 40 students. My normal number of students would be 35 to 40. I can’t really say that I have a lot of professionals coming back to school after being laid off. Most of my students are young, coming straight out of high school. Everyone has to take our intro level health education course, HED 100, and five of my seven classes are in-course. I use a web-based platform with the textbook, which is very helpful. It’s a new edition, and this is the first semester I’m using the web platform. At BMCC, because it’s such a popular school that serves all the boroughs, you’re going to have large numbers of students in your classes. I’m always looking for ways to make class interesting and relevant for my students, even though class sizes are large.

— by Katherine Santiago

Students, PSC show support

By CHARLISSE WAUGH

On October 5 PSC members joined students and food service workers at a 150-person rally in support of the Hunter College cafeteria workers’ union. The union, UNITE HERE Local 100, is resisting demands for a reduction in workers’ health benefits and a shift to a less secure retirement plan.

AVI Foodsystems, Inc., which replaced Sodexo as the food service contractor at Hunter in June, wants the roughly 35 cooks, cashiers and other workers to bear the cost of all health insurance premium increases and to switch their pension from their current defined-benefit pension plan to a 401(k).

HEALTH CARE

“The money we’re making is not big money, but we’re surviving off of it,” said a cook who has worked at Hunter for more than 20 years. “We couldn’t make it if we had to pay into our health care plans,” said Paula, who did not want her last name used. “We would have to go without it.”

According to Gilbert Palacios, the lead organizer for Local 100, the average salary of the Hunter cafeteria workers is about $8.00 an hour, and the insurance cost they are being asked to assume is approximately 10% of the current premium. “We wouldn’t have any money left if we had to start paying into our health insurance,” remarked Debra Johnson, a cashier who has worked in the cafeteria for 10 years. “We might as well get welfare or Medicaid.”

As for AVI’s demand to change the retirement plan, Palacios said, “most of the workers are long-time employees who are vested in the pension plan, and they don’t want those funds dumped into a company 401(k).”

On September 8 the employees held a spirited work stoppage at lunch hour, signaling to AVI management that they will fight any reduction in benefits. The workers put down their tools at the height of the lunch rush and held a “union meeting” in the middle of the cafeteria, chanting and talking with students about the issues while supervisors tried in vain to order them back to work. (See stiritup campaign.org for an online video.)

MEET THE NEW BOSS

“That was very inspiring,” said Sándor John, a union delegate from the union we wouldn’t be able to function as an employer. “Thank god for our union,” commented Johnson. “If we didn’t have the union we wouldn’t be able to survive at all.”

In addition to Hunter, AVI also began providing food services at Sarah Lawrence College in June. According to Steve Mathews, regional organizing director for UNITE HERE, the Ohio-based company is refusing to recognize the union at Sarah Lawrence. “The workers at Sarah Lawrence are very organized and they have the strong support of the students, who have already formed a solidarity group to get behind their struggle,” Matthews said. A contingent of five Sarah Lawrence students attended the October 5 Hunter rally.

Solidarity efforts at these two very different New York campuses are part of a broader campaign by UNITE HERE to win fair treatment for campus food service workers. For more information, see stiritup campaign.org.

SANDOR JOHN
Union delegate

“AVI is trying to do what’s best for the company is refusing to do what’s best for the Hunter cafeteria workers, whom we calls team members.”

“We’re offering them the same benefits they have always had – just in a different style,” Perry told Clarion. She explained, for example, that AVI believes a 401(k) is better than a defined pension plan: “With a 401(k), the team members get to make their own investment choices.”

Perlstein laughed at this notion. “That’s preposterous. That’s like privatizing Social Security, where you ‘get to manage’ your own funds,” Perlstein said. When 401(k)s were originally established, they were intended as a supplement to retirement income, not its main source. As Eric Laurensen reported in the September Clarion, “Workers are now discovering that the $25,000 to $50,000 they’ve accumulated in these accounts, on average, isn’t enough to bankroll their retirement.”

“Thank god for our union,” commented Johnson. “If we didn’t have the union we wouldn’t be able to survive at all.”

Loss of benefits would leave workers in poverty.

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NEWS

5
By PETER HOGNESS

The PSC saw double victories in September’s Democratic primary elections, as union-backed candidates won in the initial vote on September 15 and also in the runoff two weeks later. In all, 43 of 49 PSC-endorsed candidates prevailed.

“Several of the victorious candidates are young, energetic leaders in their communities and ran on a platform advocating progressive housing, development, education and tax policies,” said Steve London, PSC first vice president. “Overall, we think the outcome of the primary will mean a stronger and more independent City Council and one that has a large number of CUNY supporters.”

In the September 15 vote for public advocate and comptroller nominations, Bill De Blasio and John Liu surprised many observers by coming in first in their respective races. Both went on to secure their nominations in the September 29 runoff. Observers credited strong support from New York unions and the pro-labor Working Families Party (WFP) for the two unexpected wins.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The campaign of Liu’s opponent in the runoff, Councilmember David Yassky, took an increasingly anti-union tone in the final weeks of the campaign. Yassky emphasized his support for “pension reform” – in other words, cuts in pension benefits for new municipal employees – a stance that won him endorsements from all three of the city’s daily papers. Liu, in his victory party at the United Federation of Teachers’ headquarters, emphasized his backing from New York’s community media: El Diario, the Amsterdam News, Gay City News, Sing Tao Daily, Jewish Press and Irish Echo, among others.

“Moe Liu,” said the comptroller candidate, “who believes in building a union movement that’s accountable and responsive to its members.”

The PSC Political Action Committee is celebrating the success of the union’s endorsed candidates in the September primaries – all but six of the 49 PSC-endorsed candidates were successfully nominated in the month of September. That victory was made possible, in part, by PSC/CUNY COPE contributions.

COPE contributions = political strength

Getting involved in Williams’ race was something the PSC did that was local and had an impact,” said BC associate professor and COPE contributor Joseph Entin, who supported the effort. “Doing this all over the city will build a City Council that’s accountable and responsive to us.”

AN INVESTMENT

Faculty and staff told Clarion that their commitment to teaching and CUNY as an institution keeps them contributing, even when money is tight. “It’s an investment,” explained Ron Hayduk, the PSC/CUNY COPE coordinator and an associate professor at BMCC. “If you care about your future, your future at CUNY, your future in New York – you should contribute to COPE.” He added that any member can call the PSC office at (212) 354-1252 for a contribution form.

PSC:CUNY COPE contributions paid for the PSC bases to Pennsylvania – and they pay for more than electoral politics, notes PSC activist Iris Delatro, a long-time contributor. “I give to PSC:CUNY COPE because it helps secure important benefits,” she said. “PSC:CUNY COPE money helped our union win legislation that secured an additional 3% in my pocket when the State picked up the tab. I give for those of us in an Optional Retirement Plan.”

PSC COPE contributions, some of which go to NYUST and the AFT for lobbying efforts at the state and national level, have also helped move national legislation increasing Pell Grants and State law giving PSC members access to the Transit/Check benefit, which allows CUNY workers the option of purchasing their transit passes with pre-tax dollars.

What victories will next year’s COPE campaign make possible? The union’s policy-setting body, the Delegate Assembly, announced the additional agenda at its September meeting (you can see the whole list at www.psc-politicalaction.org), but PSC First Queens chair Kendall Stewart on the Independent Party.

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Devoted to art and healing

By JOHN TABLETON

Annecy Báez

BA: Psychology, Pace University, 1980
MA: Hunter School of Social Work, 1984
PhD, NYU School of Social Work, 1995
Reyon Fellow at Columbia University, 2007-2008
Associate HEO & Director of Counseling at Lehman

As the school year unfolds, many CUNY students find that juggling their many personal responsibilities along with academic work leaves them emotionally overwhelmed. For Annecy Báez, providing a nurturing environment where students can find solutions for anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and other mental health problems is part of her life’s calling.

“We treat students assuming that they have a lot of inner wisdom, and we facilitate that inner wisdom emerging in this safe, confidential space,” says Báez, who is director of counseling at Lehman College. A graduate of the Hunter School of Social Work, Báez has more than two decades of experience in clinical social work. She is also the author of My Daughter’s Eyes and Other Stories, which won the 2007 Márnol Prize for best first book-length work of fiction by a Latina or Latino writer. My Daughter’s Eyes draws on Báez’s experience growing up in the Bronx after her family fled the Dominican Republic when she was a small child in the early 1980s, as well as her experiences as director of a children’s trauma center at a hospital residential treatment program in Yonkers during the 1990s. A writer of deep emotional sensitivity, Báez weaves together 14 short stories in this book about young Domini- can women coming of age in the Bronx, beginning in the 1970s. She explores sensitive themes such as child sex abuse and the struggle of the individual against restrictive traditional values.

For Báez, her work as a mental health counselor and her writing as a writer are both animated by the same desire. “Everything I do in some way or another is to serve and help others,” says Báez. “There is a humble satisfaction in seeing others grow and achieve their dreams.”

BIGGEST STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGE:

“Stress is serious. It really is the beginning of creating all sorts of other problems. When you get stressed, you can’t think. You need to talk to somebody to put it all on the table and begin to realize that there are solutions and choices.”

SERVICES:

Báez works with three other full-time counselors plus a part-time staff of five at the Lehman Counseling Center. They do everything from providing individual counseling sessions to facilitating workshops to leading classroom discussions.

HOW FACULTY CAN HELP:

“Faculty are in a key position to see mental distress and can refer students to their campus counseling center,” says Báez. “They can also place the name, address and phone number of the college’s counseling center on their syllabus and let students know about counseling services early on in the semester.”

ART 4 WELLNESS:

In 2008 Báez organized an “Art 4 Wellness” workshop for Lehman students. The four-week seminar was led by an artist who guided the students in a series of reflections. At the end of the class, each student left with their own healing book that consisted of a journal and a painting of a symbol that represented their vision of healing. “I feel art is healing,” Báez says. “Anything that you can do—dance, music, photography, writing—that calms all those negative thoughts and brings the person present.”

I WORK AT CUNY BECAUSE...

“I know that I received a college education despite the odds and I want others to be able to feel that they too are able to fulfill their destiny,” Báez says she loves having the chance to serve with passion for those dreams by CUNY students, particularly Latinos, African-Americans, international students and students of color.

JOB SATISFACTION:

“You see a student who last year was depressed and now they are involved in a student club and are a student leader and are doing volunteer work. It’s like ‘wow,’ it gives you goose bumps when you see them.”

FAVORITE DAY OF THE WEEK:

“My staff laughs because I say, ‘Thank God it’s Monday.’ I cherish every moment I spend with my family (Báez is married and has a daughter, 21), but then it’s great to be at work and serve the students and be with each other.”

CURRENT RESEARCH:

Báez is working in conjunction with researchers from Penn State’s Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health on a nationwide demographic survey of student mental health. Lehman is the first CUNY college to participate in the study. Báez has also been studying Jon Kabat-Zinn’s work on “mindfulness-based stress reduction,” which combines meditation and hatha yoga to help patients cope with stress by using moment-to-moment non-judgmental awareness. She wants to assimilate insights from Kabat-Zinn’s work into stress-management programs that can be used throughout CUNY.

A WISE LATINA

“I know how to navigate different worlds and still remain her authentic self. And I think she’s filled with that resilience, that strength that allows you to be psychologically flexible, that allows you to experience pain but get up and continue despite the pain, and despite any disappoint- ment, you don’t stop. You con- tinue. This inner strength allows you to love where you come from, to love your culture.”

FAVORITE TIME TO WRITE:

“5 am, when everyone else in her home is sleeping.

BUTTERFLY KISSES:

The title of Báez’s latest short story, which has been published in Coddhill’s Riverine: Anthology of Hudson Valley Writers, edited by Laurence Carr, and in Viajes del rocio, an anthology edited by Dominican author Ruben Sanchez Feliz.

“It’s about loving somebody and still having a good relation- ship with them despite the fact that you are now with someone else. A lot of men like it because it’s not about demonizing a man because things don’t work out.”

NEXT BOOK:

Drawing on her experience of fleeing from the Dominican Republic in the early 1980s after the fall of the Trujillo dictator- ship, Báez wants to relate the emotional experience of a family forced into exile through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl.

“I started it to write as a screen play, but the story wants to be told in a creative nonfiction for- mat, and I am still working on it. There are stories that require a lot of tenderness in order to be told, and I need to listen to what the story needs, the way in which it needs to be heard, and told,” she says.

Lehman’s Annecy Báez won the 2007 Mármol Prize for the best first book-length work of fiction by a Latina or Latino writer. There are stories that require a lot of tenderness in order to be told, and I need to listen to what the story needs, the way in which it needs to be heard, and told,” she says.

California university uproar

An estimated 5,000 faculty, stu- dents and university staff filled the streets of Berkeley on September 24 to protest steep budget cuts and soar- ing costs. Smaller protests also took place across the 10-campus University of California system.

Facing a 20% reduction in state aid this year, the University of California regents are planning to increase student fees by 32%, two thousand teaching positions were eliminated over the summer. Salary reductions of 4% to 18% and unpaid furloughs have been mandated for other university employees.

On September 3 labor unions representing 70,000 workers in the UC system announced that 98% of faculty and staff had signed a vote of no confidence in UC President Mark Yudof.

Also facing a severe budget cri- sis, the California State University system is making similar cuts. California’s university crisis has its origins in the billions of dollars that reduction in state aid leaves the system with. Providing education to 440,000 students at a cost of $26,000 per student will be passed with- out a two-thirds majority.

Critical thinking

Higher education’s growing reli- ance on part-time faculty isn’t accurately reflected in the pages of U.S. News & World Report’s “Best Colleges” issue, where some schools report as much as 100% of their faculty are full-time. In response, AFT placed a full-page ad in the 2010 “Best Colleges” is- sue inviting prospective students, parents and faculty members to “Just Ask!” college representatives some simple questions about academic staffing conditions on their campus — how many faculty are full-time and what percent- age of undergraduate classes and discussion sections are taught by part-time, part-time faculty on campus and graduate assistants?” and “How likely is it that a first or second-year student at your institution will be taught by full-time, permanent faculty members?”

Flying footwear

At Istanbul’s Biliği University, a Turkish student was arrested October 1 after throwing his shoe at Dominique Strauss-Khan, man- aging director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). “I think this shows that global capital should be welcomed wherever it goes,” said Selcuk Ozbek.

Strengthening bridge

The student was chosen to come during the middle of delicate negotiations between the Turkish government and the IMF on a multi-billion dollar loan package. The IMF is reviled in many poor nations for forcing gov- ernments to agree to cuts in public spending on health, education and other essential services in return for its loans.
Welfare Fund survey set for November

The PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund will conduct a random-sample survey in November to determine participants’ familiarity with the Welfare Fund benefits program and what plans they and their families are regularly using. The survey will also gather opinions on which benefits are most valuable and where members would most like to see changes. A sampling of all Welfare Fund participants, active and retired, across all job titles, will be invited to answer an online questionnaire or complete a paper version if they do not have internet access. Details will be available on the Welfare Fund website, www.pscwny.org.

Be sure to register, go to www.jobsconference.org.

CALENDAR

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 16: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies shows Tokyo Sourced (Kiyoshi Kurosawa, 2008). PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Fl. For more information contact Albert Munoz, amunoz@pscmail.org or 718-354-1252. No RSVPs.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21 & 28: 5:30–7:30 pm / Health and Safety Watchdogs. Two-part series on indoor air quality and how to access government agencies that protect workplace safety. PSC Union Hall. To RSVP, haswatchdogs@pscmail.org.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 24: 9:30 am–12:30 pm / International Committee meeting. For location and more information, contact Renate Bredenthal at rbredent@nyc Greene.com.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 27: 6:00 pm / Solidarity Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th Fl. For more info, contact Marcia Newfeld at mnewfeld@pscmail.org.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 6: 4:00 pm / “First Friday” part-timers committee, PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Fl. For more info, contact Marcia Newfeld at mnewfeld@pscmail.org.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10: 4:00 pm / Women’s Committee meeting. At the PSC office, 61 Broadway, 15th Fl. For more information, contact Marcia Newfeld at mnewfeld@pscmail.org.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 13: 6:00 pm / Labor Goes to the Movies shows Sleep Dealer (Alex Proyas, 2007). PSC Union Hall, 61 Broadway, 16th Fl. For more info contact Albert Munoz, amunoz@pscmail.org. No RSVPs.

FRIDAY & SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 13 & 14 / National Conference to Create Living-Wage Jobs for All. Sponsored by the City of New York’s Office of the First Deputy Mayor for Human Needs and Sustain the Environment. Co-sponsored by the PSC. For location, schedule and to register, go to www.jobsconference.org.

GHI-CBP health insurance changes

Use of non-participating facilities can be costly

By LARRY MORGAN
Executive Director, PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund

An important change in health coverage coverage begins on January 1, 2010. Blue Cross is planning to start providing hospital coverage as a Preferred Provider Organization (PPO). This means that people enrolled in GHI-CBP/Blue Cross must receive their inpatient and outpatient hospital care at participating facilities or be subject to penalties. It is important to note that “hospital coverage” can include a number of outpatient procedures that may be performed outside of a typical hospital setting (see below).

Nationwide, about 94% of hospitals participate in the Blue Cross PPO network. But to avoid big increases in your out-of-pocket costs, you need to verify that the hospital or facility participates.

All acute-care general hospitals in the metropolitan New York area currently participate in Blue Cross – but it is always prudent to check. Verifying that a hospital participates in Blue Cross becomes more important outside of the New York metro area, where the percentage of participating facilities may be lower. Within New York, some ambulatory surgical facilities, which perform outpatient procedures, do not currently participate (see below).

NEW GUIDELINES

This change is among several for full-time CUNY employees enrolled in the City’s health plan, under an agreement between the Municipal Labor Committee and the City of New York to ensure overall stability in health coverage. (See the Summer 2009 Clarion, page 8.) The agreement ensured continuation of health benefits without major expense to members – but it is important to follow the new guidelines to avoid a significant increase in costs.

AFFECTS HOSPITAL CARE, SOME OUTPATIENT PROCEDURES

If you use a non-participating facility, there will be three types of financial exposure:

1) a higher deductible
2) co-insurance on the “Allowed Amount”
3) a balance billed by the hospital to cover the difference between the hospital’s charge and Blue Cross’s payment.

Avoid Penalties

What are the likely results of Blue Cross changing to a preferred provider organization (PPO)?

The answers below reflect the best information available as Clarion went to press. (Details were still subject to change at press time, so contact your insurance carrier, provider or benefits office for the most current information.)

INPATIENT: The current deductible is $300 per admission with a maximum of $750 per year. This will likely remain the same if you use a Blue Cross-participating facility.

If you use a non-participating facility, there will be three types of financial exposure:

1) a higher deductible
2) co-insurance on the “Allowed Amount”
3) a balance billed by the hospital to cover the difference between the hospital’s charge and Blue Cross’s payment.

OUTPATIENT: The current co-insurance is 20% with a $200 annual maximum. This will likely remain the same if you use a Blue Cross-participating facility.

If you use a non-participating facility, there will be three types of financial exposure:

1) a higher deductible
2) co-insurance on the “Allowed Amount”
3) a balance billed by the facility to cover the difference between the facility’s charge and Blue Cross’s payment.

Caution: Many standard referral procedures (colonoscopy, for example) may be performed at ambulatory surgical facilities and are then covered by Blue Cross, not GHI. Even if it is a procedure that doesn’t seem like surgery (which most people associate with scalps), a procedure done at an ambulatory surgical facility is a Blue Cross matter and subject to PPO rules. If you are unsure whether your coverage for a procedure is through Blue Cross or GHI, ask the procedure’s provider if the procedure will be performed in an ambulatory surgical facility or call Blue Cross.

VERIFY

Caution: Referral to a facility by a doctor – even a GHI participating doctor – is by no means assurance that a facility is participating under the Blue Cross PPO. A referring doctor may not have sufficient knowledge of the program or may even have financial incentives to direct a patient toward a non-participating site. All enrollees must assume personal responsibility for verifying that the facility is a Blue Cross participant.

Identifying participating hospitals and facilities: Members will be able to verify a facility’s Blue Cross participation by calling (800) 433-8592 or by e-mail at emore@bluecross.org.

In addition to hospitals and ambulatory surgical facilities, Blue Cross is likely to announce other facilities where participating facilities and providers must be used to avoid penalty. If so, Blue Cross will inform the subscribers who are affected.

Made to wait for their first paycheck

By PATRICK SMITH
PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund

CUNY employees may change their health insurance coverage during the annual health benefits transfer period this fall, which this year is November 1 through November 30. During the transfer period, you may switch from your current basic health plan to any other plan for which you are eligible. You may also add or drop optional rider coverage to your present plan. All changes will become effective January 1, 2010.

In order to make transfers, additions or drops in basic health coverage, eligible employees must submit a new health benefits application, available from campus benefits offices or the Office of Labor Relations (OLR) website. The Welfare Fund website, www.pscwny.org, includes a link to the OLR site, where you can find a list of insurance plans, riders and cost comparison charts. Members should submit completed applications to their campus benefits office.

TRANSFER PERIOD

Eligible teaching and non-teaching adjuncts may make changes to their basic health plans by completing the Welfare Fund’s adjunct enrollment form, along with an application for a Blue Cross or HIP plan. Plan comparisons and enrollment forms are available on the Welfare Fund website, www.pscwny.org. These forms are not available through your campus benefits office.

CUNY retirees may make health insurance changes only in even-numbered years, so their next opportunity will come in the fall of 2010.
Your October pay raise

By ELLEN BALLEISEN
Bern Community College

Mark October 20, 2009, on your calendar — all members of the PSC bargaining unit receive a pay increase of at least 3% effective on this date. The raise will follow the board increase of the 2007-2010 contract, for a compounded value of 10.5% over the 3 years.

The contract also provides these additional pay increases on October 20:
- The top step of every full-time title with an annual salary schedule will increase by 3.1%, calculated on the salary rate before the 10/20/09 increase.
- Full-timers in titles with salary ranges (not steps), such as medical school professors, and adjuncts in the law school will receive a 1.04% increase, calculated on the salary rate before the 10/20/09 increase.
- The top step of every part-time title with a salary schedule will increase by 1.04%.

When the October raise first shows up in your paycheck you will depend on your title and your campus.

Full-timers at senior colleges will see the increase partially reflected in the October 22 check. This check covers the period from 10/8 to 10/21 and will reflect the two days paid at the new rate. All subsequent checks for full-timers at all senior colleges will be completely at the new rates.

Non-teaching adjuncts and continuing education teachers at senior colleges will need to wait a little longer because they have a time lag in their checks. Different senior colleges have different pay periods for non-teaching adjuncts and continuing education teachers.

For specific information about your college, contact your payroll office. At the community colleges, all PSC-covered employees except teaching adjuncts receiving a "blended rate" (see below) will first see their new rates reflected in the 11/27 paycheck. According to the CUNY Central Office, this check will also include "pay adjustments retroactive to October 20, provided that the college submits the necessary approvals in a timely manner."

Teaching adjuncts at all campuses except LaGuardia are being paid at a "blended rate" for the entire term; the rate combines their pay rates before and after the October raise. Campus payroll offices calculated how much teaching adjuncts would earn for the entire semester, then divided this total into nine equal paychecks. At all campuses except Kingsborough and LaGuardia Community Colleges, teaching adjuncts at KCC, which runs on a different schedule, the blended rate is based on 38.81% of total hours for the semester paid at the old rate, and 61.19% paid at the new rate. Teaching adjuncts at KCC will receive their increase at eight equal paychecks.

According to the CUNY Central Office, adjuncts at LaGuardia will not be paid a blended rate this term; instead, the increase will be applied to LaGuardia adjuncts' pay rates, effective 10/20/09.

Addition for those on the top step.

Some TRS Tier One members will have pension contributions in the after-tax category. Although most pension contributions are listed in the pre-tax category, they are actually pre-tax only for federal taxes. Your pension contributions are taxable by New York City and New York State. Conversely, once you retire, your pension payments may be taxable by the federal government but tax-exempt in New York City and State.

There is no pay adjustment for teaching adjuncts with health insurance through the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund. (Eligibility guidelines are online at www.psc-cuny.org/ad junctpamphlet.htm, under “Health Care & Workers’ Compensation.”) Eligible adjuncts who choose additional coverage (e.g., for a family plan) pay the Welfare Fund directly, not through payroll deductions.

FEE-PAYERS

If you are not a PSC member, then you pay an agency fee, the same amount as union dues, to cover the union’s costs in representing all employees in the bargaining unit. Unlike members, fee-payers cannot vote on contract ratification or on elections for union officers and cannot hold union office. Some people assume they are union members, but are actually fee-payers because they have never signed a union membership card.

When you or someone you know is a fee-payer and you want to join the union, call the PSC office at (212) 354-1252 and ask the membership department to send you a card.
Opinion

BARUCH FUNDRAISER
Luxury vs. labor standards

By P.V. McINTOSH
Baruch College

T
he Cipriani restaurant group is well known as an interna-
tional glamour spots, where the rich and famous sway about
with bellhops in dainty glasses between their fingers and smile their
way onto the pages of various magazines. Whether in Manhattan, Miami or Moscow, the Cipriani name is “a byword for con-
spicious consumption,” in the words of the New York Post’s “Page Six.”

So it was with great interest that I saw Baruch College’s then-President Kathleen Waldron beaming at the grand Cipriani event hall on 22nd Street last spring — in a photo from Baruch College’s annual fund-raising dinner.

For a publicly funded college to choose such a luxurious venue in its bid to raise badly needed funds seems questionable or even bizarre — especially given the strain on CUNY’s budget in the midst of the current deep recession.

Whether from a publicity or a business point of view, it was not a shrewd move. “A gala or a party at a Cipriani establishment could disassociate a company’s image as much as American International Group, Inc. spending $440,000 on a retreat or Citigroup, Inc.’s order for a $50 million jet,” commented Jacob Jacoby, a professor at NYU’s Stern School of Business, in an interview with Bloomberg News. “For the firms that go there and pay exorbitant fees, it could conceivably be a problem if it gets into the media.”

ASTRONOMICAL PRICES

Enlightened non-profits are following Jacoby’s wise advice. The same Bloomberg report notes that a number of non-profits decided not to return to Cipriani for their recession-era fundraising dinners, concerned about both their image and their bottom line. A spokesperson for the theater group The Act-
ing Company said his organization needed to find a venue with less astronomical prices.

Astronomical prices are synonymous with Cipriani – they are part of its brand and a source of its prestige. If you party at Cipriani, it means you can afford not to ask what things cost. Would that this were true for CUNY!

But Cipriani is famous not only as an exclu-
sive destination for New York’s elite – it is also widely known as a union-buster, a cor-
porate felon, and a company that routinely flouts basic standards of employment and busi-
ness ethics.

I find it rather humorous that Baruch would launch its current fundraising cam-
paign, “Reaching New Heights of Excel-
lence,” at an establishment notorious for such low standards.

In 1989 when Cipriani took over the Rain-
bow Room, the company fired the unionized waiters en masse. It was a shabby way to treat long-serving employees — but many ob-
servers had viewed it as short-sighted from a strictly business point of view. As The New York Times put it, “Cipriani fired 250 unionized employees who had helped make the res-
taurant a favorite among New Yorkers and tour-
ists alike.”

The restaurant union organized months of picket lines by fired workers outside other Cipriani properties, which began to tar-
nish the previously “gold standard” brand.

Cipriani had risen to fame on the strength of its celebrity clientele, but now Leonardo DiCaprio, Paul Newman and Martin Scor-
sease were refusing to cross the picket line. Worse, major clients like General Motors and HBO began to cancel their bookings.

Eventually the bad publicity and lost busi-
ness became too great a price to pay, and Cipriani settled with the union. But not be-
f or its unscrupulous attitude toward even its own senior employees had been made clear.

During the long-running dispute, the Times reported, “Mr. Cipriani offered to sign a union contract at the Rainbow Room if the union would agree to slash the wages and benefits of workers at [the company’s New York flagship restaurant] Harry Cipri-
ani in half,” even though this restaurant had “a profit rate more than double the industry average.”

When the union rejected this proposal, Cipriani backed an unsuccessful effort to decertify the union at the Harry Cipriani restaurant.

But this may not have been the lowest that the company was prepared to stoop to secure victory in the Rainbow Room affair. In 2004 Michael “Mickey Scars” DiLeonardo, a former member of the Gambino crime or-
ganization, testified in federal court that he had been paid $120,000 by Giuseppe Cipriani to “help keep the unions off his back” while Cipriani attempted to take the Rainbow Room union non-van and that $400,000 of this money was subsequently given to Peter Gotti. Giuseppe Cipriani denied the charge: “I really think there has been an extensive investigation in this manner, and he [DiLeonardo] is what they call a ‘rat,’” Cipriani told Fortune magazine.

“They were not able to prove anything.” Cipriani’s repeated union-busting has been part of a broader pattern of bad employment practices by the company — practices with which I have some personal experience. In 2001 I was one of a group of 50 or so employees who brought a class action suit against Cipriani for its refusal to disburse more than $10 million in gratuities that were collected from clients but not paid to employees.

At the Cipriani catering hall at 55 Wall Street, a 22% gratuity was routinely added to the bill for corporate clients. As far as the client knew, this 22% was for work done by the waiters. But in fact these “tips” went directly into company coffers.

The company insisted the waiters were never really its employees and therefore not en-
titled to tips. “At the catering halls, Mr. Cip-
riani has tried to avoid paying union wages by hiring a non-unionized labor contractor, Michael Alexander, to supply the waiters, who are treated as independent contractors,” the Times reported. “Other caterers, such as Famous Foods, consider the waiters employ-
ees, which means they pay part of the Social Security tax on the waiters’ wages.”

NO RESPECT

In 2003 the case was dismissed, based on a narrow reading of the law. But even if not illegal, it was certainly unethical to refuse to pay the waiters their tips. What exactly did Cipriani executives do to earn these “gratuities”?

Working for Cipriani was certainly memorable. As a caterer waiter with Cipriani, I served coffee to Muhammad Ali, bellinis to Hillary Clinton and Absolut vodka to Ron Perlman. I stood blocking the way of Naomi Campbell with a tray full of bellinis when she tried to crash P. Diddy’s birthday party. But it was also memorable as a place where management’s conduct toward workers left a lot to be desired.

On one occasion, I observed an older col-
league of mine ordered to resume working after a number of hot plates fell on him. In late 1998 a large group of cater waiters went unpaid for six weeks while someone from Cipriani put all our wages in a bank account and collected the interest.

After such encounters, some may think that I am writing out of personal bias. I describe myself instead as a whistleblower. Before you discount my account, take your own look at the public record. My own expe-
riences are just a few links in Cipriani’s long chain of poor employment practices.

ABUSES

For example, New York State brought a successful suit against the company for dis-
criminating against women in employment as waiters. The manager of the Harry Cip-
riani restaurant was caught on tape telling a female applicant, “The philosophy of the company, you know, we don’t have any fe-
male positions.” The company subsequently agreed to hire women — but in 2007, a female Cipriani waiter brought suit against the company for sexual harassment.

Another pattern of abuse was alleged in a lawsuit filed by a Cipriani chef this May, charging that he had worked hundreds of hours of unpaid overtime. The chef says this is part of the company’s policy of minimizing labor costs by illegally refusing to pay work-
ers’ overtime.

Cipriani’s culture of corporate corner-
cutting goes far beyond the low standards it applies to employee relations. In 2006 Cipri-
ani Vice President Dennis Pappas, described by the Times as “a convicted mob financier,” was convicted of stealing more than $1 mil-
lion in an insurance fraud scheme. And in 2007 both Cipriani the company and Arrigo Cipriani were convicted in State court of fel-
ony tax evasion, while Arrigo’s son Giuseppe Cipriani was convicted of a related misde-
mornor.

In 2008 the State Labor Authority fined the company half a million dollars for filing false information about its ownership.

Nor does New York Trust Cipriani to pay its workers what is owed. Last January the State De-
partment of Taxation filed liens for $3.5 mil-
lion against Giuseppe and Arrigo Cipriani to ensure that its debts are collected. At that time, however, Baruch reportedly owed New York City $43 million.

New York State is right to worry, as the Cipriani business model now appears to be unsustainable. The company recently lost its lease on the Rainbow Room, after months of failure to pay rent.

It is appalling to me that Baruch has any-
thing to do with these criminals and union-
busters. Surely this sends a message to the ordinary workers, students, professors and adjun-
ts at Baruch that when it comes to the top echelons, anything goes! Instead, good la-
bor practices should be part of the high stan-
dards to which Baruch and CUNY aspire.

Of course, hiring Cipriani is far from the only poor decision CUNY has made on this front. From the cafeteria franchise at Hunter to the CUNY Research Fund (see pages 3 & 5) to the daily exploitation of adjuncts, ethical employment practices at CUNY seem to be “honored more in the breach than in the observance.”

But I believe that CUNY, and Baruch, can do better. A company with a track record like Cipriani’s should be anathema to the values of academia, in the same way as a notorious plagiarist. Both with their own em-
ployees and the vendors they hire, it is time for CUNY and Baruch to raise their highest employment standards — not the lowest.

P.V. McIntosh is the pen name of a faculty member who has taught at Baruch for four years.
GRADUATION RATES

By PHILIP PECORBINO
Queensborough Community College

The most popular measure for public accountability of colleges and universities is the federal graduation rate. Recently, and more often, higher education leaders are criticizing both the accuracy of the federal rate and way it is used as a single measure of success. In the words of a report from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), this approach produces “a factually incorrect and misleading picture of what is going on.”

The common federal measure of the graduation rate, from IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System) data, reports on graduation “within 150% of normal time.” That means six years for baccalaureate degrees and three years for associate degrees. Moreover, this statistic includes only first-time full-time freshmen who finish at the same college.

“How ridiculous it is that a student who completes a year of community college and then earns a bachelor’s degree at a four-year institution counts as a failure against the community college, because the student didn’t complete an associate degree—and as a non-entity at the four-year college, because transfer students are not included in the federal data set,” wrote Diane Auer Jones, former assistant secretary for postsecondary education, in Chronicle of Higher Education last March.

FLAWED DATA

Student Persistence in College: More than Counting Cups and Gowns, an AFT report released in 2003, notes the following about data provided under the federal Student Right to Know Act (SRK): “The SRK graduation snapshot… fails to account for public colleges and universities, who represent more than 40% of the student population. It fails to account for the fact that a large number of students transfer between four-year institutions, or that students may attend multiple community colleges, during their academic careers. It also fails to account for the fact that many students get what they want from college in terms of eventual degree or personal enrichment without graduating. The SRK snapshot labels such students as failures when they are really successes.” (The report is online at tinyurl.com/AFTcaps.)

Using only such federal data, graduation rates appear so deplorably low that some have labeled public colleges and universities as “failure factories.” But is this so? Are our students failing more than succeeding? Are our efforts so insufficiency that we are to be exhorted to enter into “Campaigns for Success,” in which the heart of the problem is defined as “changing the culture” of our colleges? A more careful examination and more diligent gathering of data reveals quite a different story.

Reliability

The first problem is CUNY’s scarce resources. To replicate ASAP or the new community college, at least 10 years to obtain her baccalaureate. No faculty member seeing them receive their degrees on graduation day would think of these students, or what they did for them, as anything less than a success. They cheer for them, as do their families, for whom they become powerful models in all their life circumstances.

Such achievers who persevere through hardship and constant challenges demonstrate the high value they place on education. The benefits for themselves, their families and society from their hard-won victories are far greater than those that result from degrees granted to well-prepared students who attend full-time for four straight years.

Students who entered college with great economic challenges and who must work equally hard to tell these students’ stories, dedicated our lives to that end. CUNY should be exulted in the endeavor to enter into “Campaigns for Success,” and baccalaureate degrees, respectively.

SUCCESS RATES

Second, using federal graduation rates as the key measure of success may tempt colleges and universities to raise their “success” rates with academic programs that exclude students who complete a year of community college, because the student did not complete an associate degree—and as a non-entity at the four-year college, because transfer students are not included in the federal data set. Programs like ASAP (full-time, not needing to work full-time, or remediation-exempt) and the new community college plan (no transfers, full-time, not needing to work full-time, or remediation-exempt) will delay graduation well beyond two and four years for associate and baccalaureate degrees, respectively.

STUDENTS’ GOALS

Programs at CUNY and elsewhere that offer significantly increased academic and financial support will produce positive changes in graduation rates. Dedicating more resources to public colleges and their students is a positive step and in fact long overdue. But as we consider the best use of our scarce resources, we need to think carefully about how to accurately define student success.

Beyond a change in the time interval, we need to think about what is measured altogether. Some who care about community colleges have begun pushing back against the insistence upon a single measure of “success” by discussing what other measures would be more accurate, realistic and truthful.

In 2006, colleges in Connecticut, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas and Virginia began efforts to report a more complete evaluation of community college student success, starting with the academic goals students set for themselves: transfer as soon as possible, part-time and persevere to graduation, career advancement and personal growth. Sooner rather than later, New York and CUNY should engage in such a similar open evaluation. It may be easier and politically expedient to use the current measure, but an honest effort to capture the full data gets us all closer to the true story.

For those of us in CUNY who look at the human beings we serve, we realize that in time most students do achieve and do succeed and that we work very hard to support their efforts to do so. In fact, most of us have dedicated our lives to that end. CUNY should work equally hard to tell these students’ stories. “Success” is written all over those tales, too often left untold and uncommented.

Losing sight of student achievements

By DEBORAH BELL
Executive Director, CUNY Office of Public Affairs

In a presently impossible order of magnitude.

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By DEBORAH BELL
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Tell Albany: Don’t cut CUNY

On Tuesday, October 6, Governor Paterson called for a $53 million midyear budget cut. Paterson’s proposal comes after a $68 million cut to CUNY last year, a $44 million cut so far this year and a 15% tuition increase for CUNY students. Because the Fall semester is already underway, CUNY would have to “absorb” this cut in the Spring semester alone. But it’s not too late to stop these cuts! Paterson needs State legislators to vote down the measure. The union is calling on Paterson to reconsider and the legislature to reject this destructive proposal. Go to the PSC website, www.psc-cuny.org and click on the “Act Now” graphic to send your letter to State lawmakers.

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collective power

By Barbara Bowen
PSC President

Why our salaries are going up

When our salaries increase on October 20 by at least 3% and some by as much as 6.1% or 8.75% — it won’t be because 80th Street has had a sudden fit of largesse. It will be because we used our collective power as a union to win an increase and then fought to distribute the increase in a way that maximized its impact. CUNY salaries have still not recovered fully from the erosion of the 1980s and 1990s, but with the increases in this contract, particularly to the top step, the recovery has begun. By narrowing the gap between our salaries and those of comparable institutions, the union has scored a victory ultimately for students, because it is their education that is endangered when the University fails to pay competitive wages.

PRIORITIES

The higher salaries that will start this month have a history, and it’s a history worth reflecting on as we face what may be even more of an uphill battle in the next round of bargaining. I would begin the history at the union’s mass meeting in October 2007, when close to a thousand people crowded into the Great Hall at Cooper Union for a discussion of the PSC’s bargaining strategy. At that meeting, for the first time in the PSC’s history, the union publicly announced a multi-year bargaining strategy: some things were named as priorities for the immediate round of bargaining, others were held for the future.

The strategy worked. At the center of our agenda was a commitment to making measurable progress on restoring CUNY salaries to nationally competitive levels. Other priorities were also announced that night, including resisting management’s demand for “merit pay” instead of salary increases and winning such new provisions as paid parental leave and graduate health insurance.

We didn’t win every priority demand — and were especially frustrated because of the lack of progress on improving job stability for long-serving adjuncts — and we haven’t finished the battle to restore CUNY salaries. But two years after that October 2007 meeting, CUNY is a university with graduate employee health insurance, paid parental leave and top salary steps that are at least 13.8% higher now than in 2007. How did this happen? The PSC organized.

The first step was to demonstrate that the union’s bargaining agenda had the members’ support: 5,534 faculty and staff quickly signed on to a petition demanding restoration of salaries, no erosion of academic freedom and no weakening of tenure. Another 700 people signed a petition for graduate employee health insurance, and in February hundreds more signed “Valentines” to Chancellor Goldstein, asking him to stop breaking their hearts and agree to paid parental leave. CUNY Needs a Raise became our slogan, and it appeared everywhere from lapel buttons to placards in front of City Hall.

When the petitions and slogans did not produce enough movement, we marched — in front of 86th Street, on the campuses and in militant demonstrations with other unions whose members work at CUNY. Meanwhile, the PSC leadership ran ads on television, worked hard for support among elected officials and crunched numbers late into the night to be prepared for every possibility at the bargaining table. But the real force was you.

United Front

A membership as large and articulate as ours always has potential political power; the question is whether that power can be made real by taking collective action. As CUNY faculty and staff working on nearly 20 different campuses, we have differences arising in part from our different positions in the University’s very hierarchical workplace. But we spoke with one voice when we said that our working conditions are our students’ learning conditions and that this contract needed to make progress on salaries.

That voice was heard at the bargaining table. Those of us sitting at the table gained strength — and credibility — from the force of members at our backs. (Sometimes the members were literally at our backs, as on the day a dozen pregnant women and new parents with their babies came to a bargaining session to press for parental leave.) When we vehemently rejected CUNY’s proposal to eliminate the salary step system and replace it with discretionary increases assigned by management, CUNY’s representatives knew we were serious because they had seen our organized resistance.

And when we approached management with an alternative proposal — adding special raises on the top step to the overall increase — they were ready to negotiate because they had felt the power of a united membership.

The addition of salary increases to the top step of each salary schedule is probably the most creative part of this contract. Once it became clear that the CUNY administration was not prepared to use its political capital to gain a settlement that went beyond the economic “patterns” established by the City and State, the union began strategizing on how to make maximum use of the available funds. Our solution was to distribute the increase at the top of every salary schedule, allowing for more than a 4% increase to that top step. By enhancing the current top step, rather than adding a new higher step (as some had proposed), the settlement enabled thousands of faculty and staff to receive the higher amount without waiting. When the increase becomes effective this month, the top of the full professor and higher education officer will rise to $116,364, a figure that makes CUNY more attractive both for recruitment and for those of us moving through the salary steps.

Equitable

But the increase is not limited to the top of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule. The top step of the highest scale. The top step of the assistant professor salary schedule will go up by 6.1%, as will the top of the HEO Assistant professor salary schedule.