Members voted 93% in support of the new PSC-CUNY contract. The 37-month deal provides for 10.5% across-the-board raises, with more for those on the top step and some lower-paid titles. Other provisions and side letters will establish doctoral employee health insurance, 100 more conversion lines, professional development money and a fund for paid parental leave. Implementation of some provisions is immediate, while others — including retroactive pay — are likely to take some months. Above, at the American Arbitration Association, workers stacked ballots before the results were tallied.

BUDGET
City, State slash funds for CUNY
Albany gouged $68.3 million from CUNY’s budget this spring and summer. Chancellor Goldstein’s comments gave State lawmakers the green light.

OUR RIGHTS
Free speech fight at BMCC
A campus referendum at BMCC to defund NYPIRG kicked off a First Amendment struggle between PSC members and the BMCC administration.

LOANS CUT BACK
Banks ice out CC students
A Bronx Community College student shares his perspective on banks’ decision to reduce their lending to community college students.

RAISES
New contract’s salary tables
See how your salary will change under the new collective bargaining agreement. The numbers for each step and each title are inside.
How did you vote on the contract & why?

Clarion’s Roving Reporter talks with members at City Tech

JEAN KUBECK
Assistant Professor
Psychology

I voted for it. Why did I vote yes? I thought it was pretty reasonable and compared well to SUNY’s contract and others in terms of salary. The sick leave bank – that made sense to me, because when I worked in Colorado they had something like that. You could donate sick days for people who needed them, and that’s the essence of what this is doing. It’s a really good idea. And parental leave is a huge step forward for individuals with new kids, both for moms and for dads.

I would like to have seen something more for City Tech, because our teaching load is still one more course than the other senior colleges. In the last contract we came down from five and four, to four and four. I would have liked to have seen this contract move us to four and three.

BARRY ANTOKOLETZ
Adjunct Lecturer
Speech

I voted yes. Although it’s never enough, it seems to be more than previous contracts. Given how hard it is to get anything out of the City, and the economic times we’re in, I’m glad to get it settled.

This union, they take it a step at a time, and each time they get bolder and bolder. History shows that the union record is that whatever they don’t get this time, they struggle for next time.

For me, the salary increase is going to total about 16% with the extra increase on the top step – and that’s pretty good. More full-time lines for adjuncts, that’s good.

My big sore point is unemployment. The law should be changed so adjuncts can get unemployment insurance without any trouble. If you don’t get a summer job, or an inter-session job, you should get unemployment insurance like any other job.

JAQUI ELLIOTT
Senior College Lab Technician
Biology

I voted yes because I believe this was the best possible contract we could get right now. We got a lot of advances in this agreement, like the paid parental leave and the sick leave bank. If we went back to the bargaining table, we could have lost many things that we had gained. We did not get everything, but I thought it was workable.

The salary differential for CLTs with a master’s or doctorate – that’s a first, and we need it.

It would apply to everybody that I know. And now that people are aware of this, it will encourage more people to go back to school and work for those degrees.

For the future, my basic belief is that by effective organizing and mobilizing across every title at CUNY, as well as the students, we can win a better contract and the public will benefit. Let’s start working on it now.

WENDY SCRIBNER
Adjunct Lecturer
English as a Second Language

I voted no. I voted yes on previous contracts that had some of the same problems for adjuncts – but this time I just felt more impatient.

We had no real gains on job security. Every term most adjuncts, including me, go through terrible stress not knowing how many courses we’ll have. I’ve worked in the CUNY system for 15 years – but until a few days before this semester started, I didn’t know whether I’d have enough classes to keep my health insurance.

Also, giving the same percentage wage increase across the board widens the gap between adjuncts and full-timers. Personally, I’ll get that extra increase on the top step – but most adjuncts won’t.

I felt that the small gains for adjuncts, like conversion lines or the Professional Development Fund, weren’t enough to vote yes. I respect the union and our leadership, but we need to do more to change the two-tier system.

PAT RUDDEN
Professor
English

I voted yes – enthusiastically yes. This contract isn’t perfect, but it breaks important new ground in a number of areas, particularly the paid parental leave fund. We’re the first public-sector union in New York to get this, and people on my campus are very excited about it. That includes some people I thought otherwise have left the University.

It’s probably the most exciting thing in this contract – although the raises are pretty exciting, too. They’re not what we deserve, of course, but they’re better than we’ve seen in quite a while, especially for the top salary step in each title.

Another good thing about the raises was the timing. With this State budget deficit, if they’d taken longer who knows what we would have ended up with? Also the timing was good because we aren’t waiting for years without any raises, as in the past.

Interviews by Nick Jahl & Peter Hogness

New contract is powerful—if we enforce it

1. I want to thank all of the activists who fought so hard to win the last contract. We made some important gains and are well positioned to start mobilizing for the next round of negotiations.

2. At LaGuardia’s Opening Sessions, Barbara Bowen was happy to announce that this would be the first year under her administration that we are not negotiating a contract. It seems that in a year when we are not bargaining, it will be to our advantage to organize for contract enforcement. Since the contract is only as powerful as we make it, it is our responsibility to make sure that we use it as much as possible.

3. Workload seems like an enormously important issue for us to mobilize around using as many strategies as we can. Community College full-time faculty have begun to organize themselves to address this issue, and I hope that other constituencies will do so as well. Karen Miller

LaGuardia Community College

Organizers deserve respect

At the Republican Convention, Governor Sarah Palin and former Mayor Rudy Giuliani both used the term “community organizer” as something to laugh at. Clearly they do not understand nor respect the work of the thousands of community organizers working in urban neighborhoods and rural communities across this country. Their ridicule of this honorable, skilled profession, to which Barack Obama committed himself after college, is an affront to the millions of low-income and working-class people who are struggling to improve their conditions and better the lives of their neighbors.

Community organizers help bring ordinary people together to collectively solve problems. They work to improve housing, health care, schools, the environment and social services. They build and support local leadership and help create the kind of organizations that give invisible people a voice in the political process.

They work “in the trenches” for long hours with too low pay to bring people out of poverty and despair, instill hope and opportunity, and create resources that strengthen neighborhoods. They are the glue that keeps many communities from disintegrating and falling into decay.

To Sarah Palin, Rudy Giuliani and John McCain: there are many ways to serve this country and to build a secure America. We should honor the work, dedication and competence of community organizers.

Terry Mizrahi
Hunter College School Social Work

The personal is political

1. The religious right was known for condemning teen pregnancy on moral grounds. But they have flip-flopped; the 17-year-old daughter of vice presidential hopeful Governor Sarah Palin of Alaska is with child... She is accepted, supported and praised. I agree that when kids get into trouble, families need our support, but I sense a racial double standard. I was more than stunned when I saw a Republican delegate on TV with a button on her hat that said “I Support Unwed Mothers.” These same political forces showed no such accepting attitude when they championed punitive welfare “reform” policies that penalize women for having children before marriage. While most mothers on public assistance have been white, the public wrongly assumed most were women of color – and Republicans used vicious attacks on “welfare queens” to win votes.

2. Republicans demand abstinence-only programs that prevent schools from teaching about contraception, abortion and safe sex. They cut services for pregnant teens. And Palin wants a Constitutional amendment to criminalize abortion, including cases of rape or incest. Yet she told the press, “We’re proud of Bristol’s decision to have her baby” – a decision she would take away from others.

Some think that Palin’s daughter got a pass on unwed teen pregnancy because her family is affluent, white and on the Right.

Mimi Abramowitz
Hunter College School of Social Work

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WRITE TO: CLARION/PSC, 61 BROADWAY, 15TH FLOOR, NEW YORK, NY 10006. E-MAIL: PHOGNESS@PSCMAIL.ORG. FAX: (212) 312-7095.

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LaGuardia Community College

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Many provisions of the new contract are now in effect, while others will be implemented over the next few months. The first question for many members is, “When will we get our raises and retroactive pay?” In previous contracts, this has taken several months, as the State and City reprogram their computers and several months, as the State and City reprogram their computers and systems with salary steps and 5.75% for part-time. CUNY's salary scales. (See below and page 8 for more details.)

“The best thing about this contract is its creativity,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “In addition to decent salary increases, it stretches the available dollars to provide bigger increases at the top and the bottom of the salary scale, and includes some equity provisions and advances we had sought for years. This creativity was possible because members organized. Their campaigns, on issues like parental leave or graduate employee health insurance, helped shape the agreement.”

The union organized around the slogan “CUNY Needs a Raise,” arguing that uncompetitive salaries had seriously weakened CUNY’s ability to recruit and retain faculty and staff. The targeted raises for the top salary step were seen as a way to start closing the pay gap between CUNY and comparable institutions, even if the total economic package was constrained by the “pattern” imposed on public employee unions by New York City and State.

The contract includes a number of other new provisions, and several are detailed below. “But union victories are also reflected in what is not in this agreement,” Bowen told Clarion. She noted that the PSC turned back management demands to eliminate salary steps, remove elected department chairs from the union, slash job security for those in the Higher Education Officer series and introduce so-called “merit pay.” PSC chapter chairs across CUNY said that their members were overwhelmingly in support of the agreement. “I heard no one on campus say they wished it had been turned down,” said Bob Cermele, chapter chair at City Tech and also a member of the union’s bargaining team. “I think members were very appreciative of the contract.”

People generally felt that a “yes” vote was a no-brainer. “Most people on my campus supported it,” said Carl Williams, PSC chapter chair at John Jay. “They voted yes and won bigger job security.” But that strong backing was not unanimous. Williams noted, “There were state adjuncts who strongly advocated for a no vote,” he said. “I can understand their wanting better job security, and we will have to press on this issue in the next agreement.”

**NOT PERFECT**

One of those was Michael Seitz, an adjunct at John Jay. “I was terribly disappointed,” Seitz told Clarion. “I felt I could not support it, so I joined the ‘Vote No’ campaign.” Basic job security provisions for part-timers was one of the PSC’s priority demands, but management took a hard line stance against any changes.

Without gains in job security, argued Seitz, “Then at least the settlement should not worsen inequity in pay – for me that was sort of a last straw.” The larger top-step increase for adjuncts (see below) was described by union negotiators as a first step in closing the gap in pay, but Seitz said this was not enough: “What we needed was something that would benefit the whole community of adjuncts, and this only benefitted security.”

The adjuncts on the bargaining team and the union’s Executive Council all supported the agreement. “It was our opinion, having been in the thick of negotiations over the year, that this was the best we could do at this time,” said bargaining team member Marcia Newfield. “I voted ‘yes’ for the conversion lines, professional development funds, graduate health insurance and an extra percentage at the top.” Newfield and other EC members said that the PSC must find new ways to tackle adjunct job security. “We don’t have to wait for the next contract fight to make progress in this area.”

**TECHNOLOGY**

Turnout was about the same as in the last contract vote two years ago, 54% compared to 56%. Albert Sherman, chair of the College Lab Tech chapter, said that the new use of Internet and telephone-based voting systems with secure passwords made it easier for members who had been away for the summer to cast their vote before the deadline. “I’d like to see more use of electronic tools by the union in the future,” he said. “We can use technology to help democracy.”

A total of 1,846 members cast votes via the Internet and 1,069 voted by phone, while 4,339 used the traditional paper mail ballot.
On June 23, the CUNY Board of Trustees unanimously approved the University’s Master Plan for 2008-2012. Chancellor Goldstein told Trustees that the plan “embraces and advances the core values of this University.”

University Faculty Senate (UFS) and PSC leaders said that while they support individual projects outlined in the plan, in many respects it neglects the vast majority of CUNY’s students, faculty and staff. “In several ways, the Master Plan continues to move us away from what CUNY used to stand for, which was opportunity and access for all,” said UFS Vice Chair Lenore Beaky.

“To meet its historic mission, CUNY must overcome major structural problems caused first of all by a historic withdrawal of public funding,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. “But the Master Plan leaves those structural problems largely unaddressed.”

**PROBLEMS LOOM**

“Between 1990 and 2003, CUNY lost 1,605 full-time equivalent student,” London noted. While the new CUNY plan addresses the University’s capital needs in some detail, he said, the other structural issues caused by this lack of funding are given short shrift. “CUNY’s academic labor system relying on highly exploited adjunct labor is not addressed. Recruitment and retention of full-time faculty members are mentioned, but the plan voices no commitment to reversing the long-term erosion of salaries or tackling the reduction of teaching load, both of which are necessary for CUNY to become competitive and attract a new generation of scholars.”

The new Master Plan puts special focus on the natural sciences at CUNY, as well as nursing and teacher education. It seeks smoother articulation between CUNY’s community and senior college degree programs and emphasizes continuing the University’s collaboration with NYC’s Department of Education on various pre-college programs. The plan also calls for founding a new Graduate School of Public Health.

The document urges studying the creation of a new community college, probably in Manhattan. It also calls for a feasibility study on establishing an “academic program in pharmacy” at CUNY, an idea proposed by the UFS. “The pharmacy doctorate is something we have been trying to realize within CUNY for many years,” said UFS Chair Manfred Philipp. “It was mentioned in this plan and that is entirely new.”

But UFS and PSC representatives say, unfortunately, this kind of openness to faculty and staff input is very much the exception, not the rule, in this Master Plan.

**ADMINISTRATIVE**

“It is a heavily administrative document,” said Beaky, “one that in general does not support faculty governance and curriculum control.” For example, she said, the plan does not describe faculty role in the design of key initiatives like the proposed School of Public Health or expansion of “2 + 2” degree programs that link senior and community colleges. But such initiatives need faculty participation in their initial stages of development, said Beaky — not just limited consultation after their basic direction is set. “Faculty governance should be involved from the beginning, with curriculum and program design approved by faculty members.”

The new Master Plan heavily emphasizes programs that are seen as more selective or elite. In the section on hiring more full-time faculty, for example, more than one-quarter of the space is devoted to the CUNY-wide Honors College, which enrolls less than 1% of CUNY’s students. The plan’s section on the Honors College is as long as the section on community colleges, which enroll one-third of CUNY’s student body.

The pulled discussion of the Honors College is not a problem in itself, said Philipp. What is of concern, he told Clarion, is that the plan neglects major areas of need. For example, the UFS had urged that the plan provide more resources for ESL and CLIP courses and more support for these students and those who teach them. “We need professional development for faculty who teach ESL students, and the students need more tutors and writing centers,” said Beaky. The UFS also expressed disappointment that the plan did not ask for adjustments to New York’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), such as expansion of part-time TAP, that would better address the realities of CUNY students’ lives.

**INVISIBLE ADJUNCTS**

The terms “adjunct” or “part-time faculty” are not mentioned once in the entire Master Plan, and UFS representatives agreed with the PSC’s criticism of the failure to mention those who teach half of CUNY’s classes. The UFS had urged that the Master Plan include support for grant applications and measures to support contingent faculty as academics, such as access to office space, computers and printers.

The Master Plan sets a goal of 70% of CUNY provided by full-time faculty, a target that was also part of the 2000-2004 and 2004-2008 Master Plans. In fact, CUNY has cited the need to move beyond the mid 1990s – but the years since have seen only modest progress.

**CAPITAL PLAN**

“The 6,700 full-time faculty in Fall 2007 is far from the 11,000 full-time faculty of CUNY in the 1970s, when enrollment was comparable to today’s,” London said. The CUNY-wide average for undergraduate courses taught in 2004 was 46%, and the administration has not released University-wide figures since. The section on capital spending at CUNY drew more support from union and UFS representatives. Here the Master Plan emphasizes the need to fund a backlog of projects for maintenance and repair, to protect health and safety at CUNY, and create good learning environments. The plan includes a new emphasis on environmental sustainability.

CUNY’s Master Plan now goes to the Regents for approval, which the Regents will vote on final approval of the plan this fall. The Regents held public hearings before voting on the previous Master Plan, but have not yet committed to doing so this time around.

Formerly president of Verner Liipert, a Washington law firm whose private practice is focused on labor and employment law, DLA Piper describes Pantaleo’s division can provide a wide range of services to CUNY. “I personally represent unionized employers almost exclusively,” Pantaleo of the CUNY Board of Trustees is Peter S. Pantaleo, head of the employment law division of one of the largest new firms in the United States. A member of CUNY’s Business Advisory Council, he was the first trustee to be named by Gov. David Paterson. Pantaleo was nominated on June 4 and confirmed by the State Senate soon after.

“I’m really enthusiastic about the notion of high-quality public university education,” said Pantaleo. “My dad was an operating engineer, and I come from a fairly modest immigrant family background. CUNY is a phenomenal idea that seems to be working pretty well.”

**HOTELS & GAMBLING**

Pantaleo has practiced corporate-side labor law for many years, representing employers in the conflicts with employees and their unions. Employers in the hotel and gambling industries have been a special focus for Pantaleo, who represented MGM in its battle to prevent unionization of the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, then the largest hotel in the world.

DLA Piper describes Pantaleo’s practice as “advising multinational employers on complex, politically sensitive labor and employment matters.” He is one of two top executives in charge of global employment and pensions group, head of its labor law division for the US, and managing partner of the firm’s New York office.

DLA Piper notes that Pantaleo “has represented employers confronted with traditional union organization efforts as well as corporate campaigns.” For those who wish to maintain “a union-free environment,” the firm says, Pantaleo’s division can provide a wide range of services: “When union activity arises, we work closely with the company’s labor relations efforts and the election campaign. This may cover the entire spectrum from strategy through tactics, methods and techniques, to representation before the NLRB in unfair labor practice charges.”

UFS had urged that the plan provide[1] more resources for ESL and CLIP courses and more support for these students and those who teach them. “We need professional development for faculty who teach ESL students, and the students need more tutors and writing centers,” said Beaky. The UFS also expressed disappointment that the plan did not ask for adjustments to New York’s Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), such as expansion of part-time TAP, that would better address the realities of CUNY students’ lives.

**TWOSIDES**

Pantaleo downplayed the extent of his firm’s work in opposing unionization and said he had negotiated many management neutrality agreements for union organizing drives. “I am a management labor lawyer,” he said. “It takes two sides to have a collective bargaining agreement.” Speaking personally, he said, “I actually am a proponent of collective bargaining.”

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**BIPARTISAN**

Pantaleo’s political donations have been significant. In 1999 he contributed to Elizabeth Dole’s and John McCain’s campaigns for president, while in 2008 he gave to the presidential bids of Chris Dodd and Joe Biden. By far his largest donations, however, have been to his own firm’s Political Action Committee. “Twelve of the 15 voting members of the CUNY Board are current or retired corporate officers,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “Not one is from an organization that represents labor – though thousands of union members and their children depend on CUNY.”

Pantaleo is a competitive swimmer and triathlete and has been a member of the New York City Fire Department. He received his bachelor’s degree at the University of North Dakota in 1976, after earning his degree at the University of Wisconsin.

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CUNY was hit with a $506 million cut in State funding in August, after the Legislature approved reductions proposed by Gov. David Paterson. The move came on top of $177 million in cuts that were part of the State budget passed last spring and a $3.9 million reduction in City aid to community colleges.

The PSC fought the cuts hard, lobbying lawmakers, asking members to speak out and generating press coverage across the state. “Opposition among legislators to the governor’s additional August cuts was strong,” said PSC First Vice President Christoph Kimmich told the Executive, the college’s student paper. “What we have to do is (a) reduce the funds we normally set aside for hiring adjunct faculty and (b) postpone or defer maintenance, renovation, repairs, painting and the like. This will probably have the effect of reducing some courses we offer now....”

Citing a ballooning budget deficit, Paterson summoned legislators back for a special session in August and called for State spending reductions of 7% across the board. Legislators did reject proposed cuts to the State’s base aid to both SUNY and CUNY community colleges and to the State’s Tuition Assistance Program, reflecting these constituents’ opposition to further cuts.

Albany corridors were buzzing with speculation about why Goldstein had backed off from firm opposition to the CUNY cuts. Top SUNY administrators spoke openly about the State budget squeeze as “an opportunity” to win support for a new policy of permanent, annual tuition hikes, and some wondered if the CUNY chancellor had similar ideas.

Annual tuition increases are part of Goldstein’s “CUNY Compact” proposal for financing the University, which calls for tuition increases to finance the majority of the costs of programmatic increases at the University. At a Student University Senate retreat at the start of this semester, Goldstein said bluntly that a tuition hike at CUNY is necessary.

The PSC has strongly opposed tuition increases at CUNY. “In times of economic hardship, investment in higher education should be increased, not cut,” London said. “Funding increases would put new financial burdens on our student body in an already difficult economic climate and make retention and increased graduation rates – some of CUNY’s important goals – even harder to achieve. There is no substitute for public funding.”

The union has also pointed out that past tuition hikes have often left CUNY with less net revenue than before: higher tuition has been imposed along with cuts in State support, which then reduced the baseline for public funding in future years.

The essence of the “Compact” is supposed to involve an increase in State funding as a precondition for tuition hikes, said London. “At a time when we are starting the next budget cycle $60 million in the hole, it would go against the Compact’s own logic to raise tuition,” said London.

Last spring’s CUNY budget didn’t help CUNY students’ burdens. Cutting City aid to community colleges by $5.9 million and a 39% reduction in the Vaneille Scholarships were bad enough. In some ways worse was the City’s failure to meet State capital appropriations for CUNY, which left $337 million “on the table,” including money badly needed for the replacement of Fiterman Hall, the BMCC building destroyed on 9/11.

In May, 150 PSC members and students were joined by 14 City Councilmembers in speaking out at City Hall against Bloomberg’s cuts. This grassroots lobbying got some substantial restorations: the Council restored $24.4 million to the community college operating budget and provided $10.4 million for student services and programs. But while the picture was less bleak than at the State level, the union called the final City budget “disappointing.”

CUNY leaves capital $ on the table

By DANIA RAJENDRA

Obama, McCain differ on higher education policy

By PETER HOGNESS & KARAH WOODWARD

Comparing Barack Obama’s and John McCain’s positions on higher education, one thing is clear: the Obama campaign has given the topic a lot more attention. The McCain campaign did not release a higher education policy statement until August 15, and it adds up to six short, general paragraphs. Obama released his months ago and it runs for several pages, presenting a number of proposals that are fairly detailed.

Opposing views on Pell Grants, research funds

The two candidates have different views on student aid, the focus of most federal higher education policy. When Obama was elected to the Senate, the first bill he introduced called for raising the maximum Pell Grant from $4,050 to $5,100, produced called for raising the maximum Pell Grant from $4,050 to $5,100, and praises the role that “institutions of higher learning have played as the nation’s primary research and development laboratories.” Another funding priority for the Democratic nominee would be a new program of grants for “outstanding early-career researchers.”

MOCKING RESEARCH

McCain’s main comment about federally funded research has been to highlight — and ridicule — a study of grizzly bear DNA. “Three million dollars to study the DNA of bears in Montana,” grows a McCain TV ad. “Unbelievable!”

Researchers at the US Geological Survey say that in fact the study is key to determining whether or not the bears are still an endangered species: barbed-wire stations in the forest snag fur from passing bears, and genetic fingerprinting then allows scientists to build an accurate population count. McCain’s higher education policy statement promises that “eliminating earmarks would immediately free up funds for research.”

“pork barrel projects.” However, McCain has said that eliminating earmarks will pay for tax cuts, US troops in Iraq and a balanced budget. Given that in 2005, the Office of Management and Budget put the total cost of earmarks in the federal budget at $18.9 billion — less than the US spends in Iraq every two months — it’s not clear how much would be left over for research funding.

Aside from earmarks, McCain’s Web site says almost nothing about federal research support; instead it emphasizes tax breaks for privately funded R&D.

The differences in the two candidates’ approaches to these issues might be related to Obama’s 12 years on the faculty of the University of Chicago. Whether the reasons are partly personal or purely political, Obama’s and McCain’s stands on higher education present a study in contrasts.

The AFT, the PSC’s national affiliate, has endorsed Barack Obama for president. Union members from New York will be working to help him win, both locally and in other states, if you’d like to get involved in the PSC’s efforts, contact Amanda Deleanus Magahares at adejan@ pscmail.org or (212) 354-1252.
BMCC chapter wins free speech tussle with management

First Amendment rights at issue

By KARAH WOODWARD

In the final days of Spring semester, the administration at Borough of Manhattan Community College ordered faculty and staff not to express their opinions about a campus referendum on student fees. But a strong response from the union forced the administration to retreat from its original position.

“The PSC and its members fully intend to continue to speak out on this and other issues, regardless of the administration’s attempts to stifle free speech and public debate,” wrote PSC Chapter Chair Rebecca Hill in a May 8 open letter. A month later, a new statement from the college administration acknowledged PSC members’ rights to do so.

STUDENT REFERENDUM

At issue was a student referendum on funding for BMCC’s chapter of the New York Public Interest Group. NYPIRG is the largest student-directed advocacy organization in New York State and is active on nine CUNY campuses.

At many colleges, students have voted to support NYPIRG through student activity fees. At BMCC, the group is supported by a $4 assessment that students have reaffirmed in repeated referendums since NYPIRG came to campus in 2003. Last Spring’s referendum at BMCC would have defunded NYPIRG, diverting the money to a study abroad program instead.

NYPIRG tackles a range of issues, and many — such as fighting budget cuts and tuition hikes at CUNY — also affect faculty and staff. BMCC’s PSC chapter has organized with NYPIRG on some of these campaigns: for example, in May and again in August the two groups worked together on City Hall protests against CUNY budget cuts.

In response to the referendum, NYPIRG appealed to students for support and asked the PSC to make its voice heard. PSC union members signed a statement, which NYPIRG circulated as a poster and leaflet.

Ron Hayduk, a union delegate who has worked with NYPIRG, also circulated his own letter encouraging faculty to speak with students and urge them to vote “no” on the referendum.

“The way the referendum was framed was a little misleading,” said Hayduk, an associate professor of political science. “A lot of faculty were not clear that essentially the referendum would defund NYPIRG completely, not just transfer some funds to the student abroad program. I felt people needed to be better informed.”

On May 1, BMCC Vice President Robert Diaz wrote to both the entire college staff and to Ron Hayduk individually, citing student election rules and insisting that faculty and staff must maintain “a posture of neutrality” in the NYPIRG referendum. Diaz wrote to Hayduk that his letter had “crossed the boundary of free speech” and was “not acceptable.”

“There is in fact no prohibition of faculty from speaking out on referenda such as the one to defund NYPIRG,” stated Hill’s May 8 response, which was also circulated to BMCC faculty and staff.

“We are part of the campus community, and we have a right to speak up about political decisions that will affect our lives here.” The administration’s gag order “violates the core rights of our members and the entire community of BMCC,” said Hill.

PUBLIC ISSUES

“Students have the right to organize a referendum on any of a variety of public issues,” said Charlie Post, associate professor of social science and the chapter’s grievance officer. “NYPIRG’s role is just one of them. If, say, the military were recruiting on campus, that might be the subject of a student vote. And faculty and staff clearly have the right to express their opinion on any of these controversies.”

Peter Zwiebach, the union’s director of legal affairs, told Clarion that the rules cited by Vice President Deax on faculty neutrality did not apply — but that even if they did, they would be unconstitutional. “These rules clearly speak to elections for student government office, not a referendum,” Zwiebach observed. “However, I have no idea whether that means BMCC can not institute election policies to limit the fundamental right to freedom of speech.”

GAG ORDER

Union activists also pointed out that management’s attempt to restrict free speech was applied unequally. For more than a decade, a faculty member at Brooklyn College was advocating for an end to NYPIRG’s funding from student fees on that campus, but he has faced no repression or censorship from campus administration.

And at BMCC this Spring, the administration had in fact allowed faculty to assist the anti-NYPIRG referendum. Earlier in the semester, the first effort to get the student referendum on the ballot had failed due to lack of signatures. After the administration gave the green light to a second attempt, students supporting the referendum recruited faculty members to help them gather signatures. Hill’s letter noted that the administration knew about this practice but took no action against it, and she said this was a clear case of “unequal treatment of faculty speech, based solely on viewpoint.”

When the votes were in, NYPIRG won by a comfortable margin and retained its funding. The following month, BMCC management retreated from its earlier stance and the gag order was withdrawn.

UNEQUAL

“As a matter of First Amendment law and consistent with shared governance, the faculty has a right to comment on such matters,” wrote Vice President Diaz in a June 10 e-mail message to the entire campus. However, the administration still urged faculty to avoid commenting on political debates within the student body: “The administration believes that campus civility and harmony are best achieved when faculty members do not inject themselves into internal affairs or election disputes of the students,” Diaz wrote.

“The PSC is committed to defending academic freedom and freedom of speech on campus,” responded Hill. “It’s a fundamental part of our lives as scholars, and it is crucial to the health of the University that faculty can speak on issues that are curricular and extracurricular.”

Solidarity begins at home

PSC members Avi Bornstein and Deedra Brown brought their children to the Labor Day Parade on September 6.
By DANIA RAJENDRA

Overtime by employees in the Higher Education Officer series (HEOs) was the subject of a major agreement reached this summer between CUNY and the PSC. The late July accord followed union victories in a grievance and a lawsuit on the overtime issue, with the PSC charging that CUNY had violated both the union contract and federal law. The violations? That CUNY management routinely required HEO-series employees to work more than the contractual 35 hours per week – without compensation.

The union won a settlement in the lawsuit in April 2007 and won the grievance three months later when an arbitrator ruled in the PSC’s favor. Pursuant to the decision, the PSC and CUNY worked out the recent implementation agreement on how HEOs can claim their time.

Now, all HEOs who work between 35 and 40 hours a week should have the extra time returned to them as compensatory time off (or “comp time”). For overtime beyond 40 hours, HEOs will get either comp time or pay at time-and-a-half, depending on their specific job.

IT’S THE LAW

Under the federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), most Assistants to HEO and many Higher Education Assistants are defined as “exempt” under the FLSA and will thus get comp time rather than pay for hours above 40. (See below for more details.)

As part of the agreement, members will get compensation for past overtime worked beyond their regularly scheduled 35-hour workweek, by the end of August 2007 (the date of the arbitration decision), and June 24, 2008, if they submitted a valid claim by August 24.

Arthur Ecock, a HEO who works in the CUNY central administration’s computer center, turned in a claim for 289 hours and 36 minutes. The numbers came from the University’s own computing data, said Greg Dunkel, a coworker and chair of the PSC’s Central Office chapter: “This is down to the minute of when he logged on, when he logged off.”

“I am a systems programmer,” explained Ecock. “I’m responsible for a wide variety of applications, such as the CUNY portal directory servers.” When something breaks, he’s responsible for fixing it. “I average 10 to 15 hours a week of overtime,” said Ecock. “We are severely understaffed.”

Ecock has worked at CUNY for 28 years, and he hopes that reckoning with his overtime will push supervisors to hire more staff. “I am FLSA exempt, so my motivation is not monetary,” he noted. “I could certainly use the additional 40-plus days of time off that 299 hours repre- sent. Adding it all up pushed me to realize that, really, I am working too much. It’s very easy to burn out.”

“But you put in these hours and you don’t get appreciated.”

IT’S A VICTORY

Ganga Persaud is an Assistant to HEO, and one of nine FSC members at LaGuardia Community College who filed the grievance and the lawsuit. He’s proud of what they achieved – a change that benefits thousands of union members. “I just put in my timesheet for 42 hours in a week – and I proved it,” Persaud said. “PSC counsel told Clarion. “That’s two hours of pay and five hours of comp time. It is a victory, because in the old days we would have gotten nothing for working those hours.”

Some HEOs said that the possibilit y of recouping their time helped make the long hours of registration more bearable this year. “Several students waited from 10 am until 4:30 pm to register,” said Higher Educa tion Associate Peter Holoman, an academic advisor in the Student Ad vocacy and Support Services Center at Medgar Evers College. “You just can’t say to these people, ‘No, I’m not going to help you. I’m going home now.’”

Some of my coworkers did leave until 9:30 pm.” As a campus HEO leader, he said, “I told them, ‘Make sure you account for that time.’ Just as important, he added, was to ensure management was aware of his colleagues’ work hours.

The settlement covers overtime that is “assigned” – which means overtime must be authorized, in advance and in writing, by an administrator des ignated by the college president. When asked to work overtime, HEOs should request the authoriza tion in writing, which should be pro vided at least 48 hours in advance whenever possible.

Overtime is also “assigned” when it results from a specific project as signed by a supervisor in addition to one’s usual responsibilities. A com mon example would be when HEOs are detailed to work registration, which happens on every CUNY campus.

“It’s just the reality,” says HEO Resources Director at your college.

Answers to FAQs about HEO OT settlement

1. What is overtime? Overtime hours are those a HEO-series employee is assigned to work in excess of his/her usual 35-hour workweek. If a supervisor assigns a HEO-series employee to perform a specific project in addition to his/her usual responsibilities, and the project requires the employ ee to work beyond his/her regularly scheduled 35-hour workweek for a defined period in order to complete the project on time, those excess hours are also overtime.

2. What is compensatory time? Compensatory time (or “comp time”) is time equal to the number of hours worked in excess of the 35-hour workweek.

3. Who is eligible? All HEO-series employees are entitled to compensatory time. HEO series employees who are “non-exempt” under the Fair Labor Standards Act (primarily Assistants to HEO and HE Assts.) are entitled to receive compensatory time for hours worked assigned between 35 and 40 hours in a week and payment at the rate of time-and-a-half for hours worked beyond 35 hours in a week, and payment at the rate of time-and-a-half for hours worked in excess of 40 hours. Most Assistants to HEO and many HE As sists are “non-exempt” and eligible for overtime payments. Most HEO Associates and Higher Education Officers are “exempt” under FLSA and not eligible for overtime payments from the University for hours worked beyond 40 in any workweek, but are eligible for compensatory time. If you are unsure of your status as either “exempt” or “non-exempt,” contact the Human Resources Director at your college.

4. How does compensatory time differ from overtime payments? Overtime is payment for all hours worked in excess of 40 hours in a workweek as defined by the FLSA. HEO series employees who are “non-exempt” must receive payment (not compensatory time) at the rate of time-and-a-half for hours worked in excess of 40 hours. Most Assistants to HEO and many HE As sists are “non-exempt” and eligible for overtime payments. Most HEO Associates and Higher Education Officers are “exempt” under FLSA and not eligible for overtime payments from the University for hours worked beyond 40 in any workweek, but are eligible for compensatory time. If you are “exempt” you are entitled to receive compensatory time for hours worked between 35 and 40 if you are “non-exempt.”

5. What do I do if I think I am misclass ified? The first step is to clarify your classification with the Human Resources Director at your college. Then, call the union and speak to a HEO grievance counselor to discuss your situation.

6. How do I earn compensatory time? When you are assigned overtime beyond your 35-hour workweek and have received written authorization in advance and your time record reflects the additional hours worked, you are entitled to receive compensatory time for hours worked between 35 and 40 if you are “non-exempt.”

7. How do I use earned compensatory time? The earning and the use of compensatory time will be recorded based on the contractual HEO “leave year” (September 1 – August 31) and will be reviewed periodically. A common Compensatory time should be sched uled to be used as promptly as possi ble as written in the agreements. You are earned and must be used no later than 30 calendar days after the end of the quarter. It will be scheduled by the union supervisor in consultation with the employee.

8. What if I am told to work in excess of my 35-hour workweek and my supervisor refuses to authorize overtime? In these situations, immediately contact a HEO grievance counselor for guidance.

9. What if I am given too much work to do in a 35-hour workweek and my supervisor tells me I should be able to complete this work within the 35-hour workweek? Your contract protects against members being required to work an excessive number of hours or being assigned an unreasonable workload. Depending on the circumstances, you may have the right to file a grievance. Please contact a PSC HEO grievance counselor for guidance in these situations.

To contact a PSC HEO grievance counselor, call the union office Tuesday through Friday between 10 am and 4 pm at (212) 345-1525. A more detailed version of this FAQ is on the union Web site at www.psc-cuny.org/HEO/HEOShourWorkweek.pdf.
Below are the salary schedules negotiated under the new union contract for all CUNY titles in the PSC's bargaining unit. The first column reflects the salary steps on the last day of the previous contract, the following columns reflect the increases reflected in the new contract. The agreement is effective September 16, 2008. See www.psc-cuny.org for answers to frequently asked questions in the special contract issue of Clarion, the new salary schedule and other contract documents.

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Adjunct Professional Development Fund

Supporting intellectual life

“the Sundance of musical theater.” With performances that run through September 28, she said it’s exciting not only for her but for her students as well. “I know for my students, I’m in some ways a role model,” she said. “I’ve told them it’s been the culmination of a lot of hard work and faith in myself. I kept going and it paid off.”

FORENSIC SCIENCE

Danielle Sapio has been an adjunct at John Jay College since 2002. She’s a lawyer – but she majored in chemistry and worked in research labs as an undergraduate. Her grant is supporting work that combines both parts of her background, in a project on the chemistry of fingerprint identification.

Sapio is a playwright who has begun writing for film and television; she teaches writing-intensive classes in the speech, communication and theater arts department at BMCC, where she has taught for the past six years.

“I think theater work has made me a more vibrant and energizing teacher,” Sapio said. She believes that many of the practical exercises the students try at the conference found direct application in her classes at BMCC.

“Writing is writing, and both students and professional writers can experience that agony of feeling, ‘Oh, it’s wrong, it’s wrong,’ before they ever start,” Sapio said. Drawing on some approaches from the conference, she said, “I’ve been able to navigate that threshold with my students, and they’ve become much less nervous or afraid.”

“With creative writing, the starting point is getting them to feel comfortable just saying something,” she added. “For many, it comes as a surprise that writing can be an act of pleasure, something they really enjoy. A lot of kids are really, really afraid of it, often because they come in with spelling or grammar issues. Those are important to tackle, but to get them there they also need to learn to enjoy the act of writing.”

Sapio’s own work as a writer comes into her classes at BMCC in another way, she said: students often ask her for guidance about pursuing a career in writing for the screen or the stage.

Sapio co-librettist on “The Myth of Gyges and the Possibility of Altruism,” taking a section of Plato’s Republic as her point of departure. “It concerns whether altruism is a genuine phenomenon, or something that human beings masquerade at for hope of future benefit,” she explained. In this case, the paper had a direct relationship to her work in the classroom at CUNY, as she discusses these ethical

Some fingerprints “are easily detected on certain surfaces,” she explained. “Others, called latent fingerprints, are harder to detect. Latent fingerprints are invisible prints that are formed by the transfer of perspiration from the finger ridges to an object.” There are various techniques for making them visible, such as the use of the chemical ninhydrin, which turns purple-blue when it comes in contact with amino acids that are found in perspiration. This process is faster when heat is applied.

Sapio’s project involves using a computer program to identify chemical analogs of ninhydrin that might have some of the same properties, and thus be useful in fingerprint identification. While not involved in experimental work herself, she told Clarion, her calculations may suggest experiments valuable to others working on developing compounds useful in forensic science. Sapio has been invited to give a series of eight lectures related to this work at the University of Rouen in France later this year. She has previously lectured at Rouen on the use of DNA in challenging past criminal convictions. Sapio said she is proposing a new course on scientific evidence in court, and her current research has contributed to her thinking about the design of that course in several ways.

PHILOSOPHY

Chrysoula Gitsoulis has been teaching philosophy at CUNY since 1988, first at Barruch and for the past four years at City College. She was three years old when her parents migrated from New York State high schools can attend CUNY and SUNY at in-state rates.

Middlewest invests

As New York State responds to its economic slowdown by further underwriting public higher education (see page 5), states in the Midwest have a proven approach – relying on their public colleges as “key players in the long-term transformation of their economies,” report government officials. These states “look to [public higher ed] to provide needed research and training for new industries,” the story said.

“The path to economic security and stability runs through the col- of the Chronicle of Higher Education Compact. Several Midwest states have had tough economic years, but limi- ited or avoided cuts to higher ed.

HIGHER ED INSIDE

HEA reauthorized

On August 15, President Bush signed the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) – five years after its expiration.

The bill won wide bipartisan support, passing the House 380 to 49 and the Senate 83 to 8. New HEA provisions in student aid include making Pell Grants available year round, requiring more transparency from lenders and simplifying the FAFSA application form.

Critics claim that costs associ- ated with new reporting require- ments – established to create more accountability – may prove bur- denome for some institutions. Not included was text from the controversial right-wing initia- tive known as “the Academic Bill of Rights,” which would limit aca- demic freedom by imposing gov- ernment monitoring of faculty members’ political views.

APT President Randi Wein- garten lauded the new law for making higher ed “more affordable,” with its Pell Grant improvements and forgiveness for graduates who work for the public interest.

NC CCs shut out undocumented students

Last month, North Carolina an- nounced that undocumented stu- dents would not be allowed to enroll in its community colleges. The state is one of a few that deny undocumented students the right to an education.

The State’s Board of Community College Trustees’ policy, adopted on Au- gust 15, codifying a motion brought by Democrat Lt. Gov. Beverly Per- due, who is running for governor. The motion passed in spite of the conclusions of the federal De- partment of Homeland Security, which has said that federal law does not prevent public colleges from ac- cepting undocumented students.

In New York State, undocu- mented students who graduate from New York State high schools can attend CUNY and SUNY at in-state rates.
STATE POLITICS

Tax fairness and CUNY’s future

By Kon Hatuok

In August, Governor Paterson called the Legislature into session to consider raising a new tax on high-earning households. It was a false solution to a real problem, and the Assembly did the right thing in rejecting it.

Property taxes are crushing many beleaguered homeowners, particularly outside of New York City, and they need relief. But capping property taxes—without regard to the levels of income and wealth—is a wrong-headed policy that has been tried in other states and resulted in disaster for public schools. In California, Illinois and Massachusetts, tax caps led to massive teacher layoffs, larger class sizes and lower student success rates. Most NY localities’ budgets are about 50% funded by property taxes.

A SOLUTION

California, for example, had one of the nation’s best public school systems until Proposition 13’s tax cap was adopted in 1978. A generation later, the RAND Corporation found that California’s second-worst teacher to student ratio in the nation and national test scores were lower than every state but Mississippi and Louisiana.

The tax cap idea is not only bad for schools, it also fails to give relief to those who need it most. A cap would only limit the rate at which levies increase in the future, doing nothing to ease the burden for seniors and working families who already suffer from unaffordable property taxes.

Thankfully, there is a better way. It’s a true and tried method that is finally getting some attention in Albany: tax the rich! Well, at least tax them somewhat more than we do today. This summer, after a vocal organizing campaign by the Working Families Party, several key unions and community groups, the New York State Assembly passed a progressive “circuit-breaker” bill instead of the regressive right-wing tax cap.

PROGRESSIVE

If enacted into law, the “circuit-breaker” proposal would deliver a targeted property tax cut based on family income and pay for it by modestly rolling back some of the income tax giveaways that have gone to New York’s wealthiest families in the last three decades.

The rich would pay somewhat more—while middle- and low-income homeowners would pay less.

The roughly 26,000 millionaires who live in New York would see their income tax rate rise by 1.75%, but that would generate more than a billion dollars a year.

In the midst of rising unemployment and a home foreclosures crisis, the circuit-breaker plan would give millions of working New Yorkers a tax break exactly when they need it most. It’s a fair and progressive way to give property tax relief to working families and low-income seniors, without denying public schools the funding they need to provide a sound education. It includes a similar rebate for renters, which would enhance both equity and economic activity.

New York’s right wing is afraid of this idea. The conservative New York Sun, for example, warned its well-heeled readers—“Millionaires’ Tax at Heart of Battle for State Senate.” The paper noted that the proposal is highly popular—supported by 78% of New Yorkers in a recent poll.

THE WEIGHT OF HISTORY

The circuit-breaker idea would be a good start—but a fully progressive tax policy would have to go further in addressing the underlying problem. In the last three decades, starting under Gov. Cuomo and Pat Tafa, the wealth of 1% of New Yorkers have seen their taxes cut in half. The tax burden has been shifted downward to the middle and working classes. Sharp reductions in federal school aid and State revenue sharing have led to higher property taxes as localities struggle to meet Municipal governments and schools afloat.

Meanwhile tax cuts for the rich meant fewer funding cuts for public services, from affordable housing to public universities. New York also imposed rising “user fees,” from transit fare hikes to tuition increases at CUNY and SUNY. (“User fees” is a convenient euphemism for regressive taxes. These are essentially taxes levied only on those who depend on public services.)

These changes in tax and spending policy are part of the reason that today, out of all 50 states, New York has the greatest disparity in income between the top 1% and the bottom half of its population. We have seen the rich get fatter rich, while the rest of us are left to fend for ourselves.

FAIR STRUCTURE

Returning to New York State’s tax structure of a generation ago, while adjusting tax brackets and the personal exemption to reflect inflation, would result in the vast majority of taxpayers paying less than we do today, while New York would gain several billion more in revenue. Public services that have been slashed could get a sorely needed boost. For CUNY, a fairer tax structure could make it possible to reverse decades of defunding of the University.

For CUNY to get what it truly needs—enough support to create good conditions for teaching, learning and research at every college—will take more than a marginal increase in public funding. The NY1 Commission on Higher Education concluded that the State’s public universities have faced a chronic problem of too little investment and called for several billion dollars in new spending to reverse that trend. But it’s very unlikely that CUNY and SUNY will win that kind of gain if every other public service is being cut or only seeing slight improvement.

New York’s public sector has been starved for many years. Until we secure an increase in State and City revenue, CUNY will be in competition with health care, housing, parks and libraries for scarce public resources. That’s a losing game—especially when the economy is contracting.

What CUNY needs is a broad shift in the politics of New York State, so that private profit and the privileges of the wealthy are not sacred and public needs are more highly valued. It’s a big lift, but one that could make a tremendous difference in our quality of life. We have the numbers; it is a matter of organizing our political strength.

BROADER VISION

The PSC can’t create this kind of change on our own. We can only do so as part of a larger movement. That means taking action as part of a broad coalition—faculty and staff, students and family members—that looks to unite working people based on our common interests. Mutual support among unions and community groups isn’t pie in the sky. Rather, it’s the only pragmatic way to win what CUNY really needs.

While working hard to mobilize our members, the PSC has also taken part in labor and community coalitions. This has increased our political clout in Albany and at City Hall. Our political action work—largely funded by members’ COPE contributions—now includes an exciting new initiative, CUNY Rising, which aims to forge longer-term alliances with students, alumni and community groups. This holds great promise in helping to change debate and politics in New York State. (For more information, see the legislative and solidarity pages at www.psc-cuny.org.)

Attacking regressive taxes and promoting progressive tax policy is one practical way to advance these goals. It focuses attention on a real problem and points to a viable solution. And in so doing, it can contribute to a broader vision for New York’s shared future.
Community college students need not apply for loans

By KESI FOSTER

The American Dream deferred – that was the message from national leaders. They moved to significantly reduce their lending to students who attend community college. Education is the great equalizer, but there was no equality in their decision: they targeted community colleges for cuts while extending their lending programs at distinguished four-year schools.

According to The New York Times (9/30/08), the following lenders have started turning away from community college students: Citibank, JPMorgan Chase, SunTrust and PNC. In the case of Citibank, it has stopped offering loans to all community college students in the state of California. Citibank gave an odd explanation: a spokesperson said the bank has “temporarily suspended lending at schools which tend to have loans with lower balances and shorter periods over which we earn interest.” In other words, four-year college students borrow too much money and pay off our loans too fast.

SAFETY NET

Other banks cite default rates and the lower earnings of community college students. This might sound like solid reasoning were it not for the facts (duly pointed out in the article) that colleges can only take part in federal loan programs if they have low default rates and that government insurance covers 95% of the value of student loans. Thus there is minimal risk involved for the lending companies.

We’ve been told that a college degree will set a person on the path for success. Not everyone takes the same path, however. People enroll in community college for many different reasons. Some didn’t get the grades in high school to qualify for a four-year school, while others have to work full-time and need the flexibility that community colleges offer. Most simply cannot afford to enroll in a four-year school. I am one of them.

After high school, I enrolled in St. John’s University because I got decent grades in high school and I was expected to go to college. I had no understanding of what I wanted to be in life and didn’t grasp the importance of the college experience and a higher education. I pretty much picked a major out of a hat and then spent my first two semesters skipping one too many a class. By the summer, I decided not to enroll for the Fall and took a full-time job instead. It wasn’t anyone’s fault – in truth, I was not ready to attend college and made my decision accordingly.

Yet in my household, education has always been stressed, and so I knew that I would return to college. After a few years of working, I matured a great deal and had a better sense of myself. I knew that I had to get back to college. St. John’s was accepted once again. I quickly realized, though, that my situation had changed dramatically. The tuition was now double what it had been when I left, and I did not qualify for financial aid since I was no longer a dependent but the sole taxpayer. A spokesperson said that a Student Aid Program is mainly designed for young people supported by their parents and provides poor support for independent working adults. With little choice, I turned to the best alternative available: community college.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

At first I was discouraged. There is a stark difference between the administration of St. John’s and that of my new school, Bronx Community College. Whereas it took only about 30 minutes to sign up for classes at St. John’s, it can take a whole day at BCC. And they may even ask you to come back due to some mysterious hold on your record that can be taken care of only by a faculty member whose schedule never overlaps with your own. During registration, I have asked the same question three different times and gotten back three completely different answers. There was also this stigma of BCC being around, carrying, around, how an education at a community college is inferior – some people refer to it as “the 13th grade.”

After attending for more than three semesters now, I would say the administration of the school has improved somewhat, and that it is a small step in the right direction. In this and other ways, basic resources at the college are badly lacking. It seems not a single functioning water fountain can be found on the entire campus, though there are soda machines in every building. The heating and AC systems are hit or miss, and the menu at the food hall is less than appealing.

As for the education, however, I couldn’t have been more wrong. It has been rigorous and very well rounded – great preparation for any baccalaureate program. I was embarrassed to qualify only as a freshman even though I was legally old enough. I felt that I had to get to class and met my classmates. The beauty of community college is the student body. Many of us have returned to community college as a second chance to achieve our goals. I met single mothers, fathers, grandparents, first-generation immigrants and people of all nations, the majority clearly focused and very eager to learn – all of us striving equally to get a piece of the American Dream, using community college as the springboard. When people would raise their hands to answer questions, you would hear West Indian accents, Eastern European accents, East Indian accents, Latino accents and some I just couldn’t place. Since I was still working, the flexibility was a necessity for me. Like me, many classmases came to class right after their full-time jobs. I don’t think most of us could afford to leave our jobs and without community college we couldn’t continue our higher education.

Our reward for saving the credit industry?

The student body at community colleges should be an inspiration to America. When I see a single mother who takes care of her children, works a full-time job, and finds time on the nights and weekends to attend school, I am inspired to continue despite at times feeling overwhelmed. Yet when it was discovered that lenders were turning their backs on these hardworking students, America didn’t blink an eye. How is it new turning its back on us, when we consider turning our backs on the banks when they want the government to bail them out?

LEVELING THE FIELD

Or perhaps we should do as economist Dean Baker recently suggested; that Congress impose a strict cap on management compensation of $2 million a year, including salary, bonuses, stock options and personal use of company jets, as one of the terms of the bailout. As Baker says, “This can be a good first step toward reining in the outrageous salaries at financial institutions that have come at the expense of the banks themselves.” We can apply the same salary caps for managers at other financial institutions that feed at the government trough.” He notes that under the current bailout, which naturally was written by the banks themselves, “the government is explicitly subsidizing the pay of incompetent bank managers.”

And if our financial institutions are going to cut back on college loans, why not downsize lending at the distinguished four-year schools? After all, students at the wealthy four-year schools have far more net worth than those at attending community college. Also, since so many students at community college work full-time, I bet we have students that deal more in taxes than students at private four-year colleges.

When it was discovered that a local congressman, my local congressman, was hoarding rent-stabilized apartments, it became a weekly media circus. Now we have financial institutions convening a press conference to defend their indefensibly corrupt behavior. Yet when it comes to the corruption of the banks, the government rushes in to save their skin – that is, their bloated salaries – and the media looks the other way.

CONSPIRACY?

In many inner cities and low-income communities, too many students fall through the cracks before they even get a chance to attend community college. As a society, we can’t allow more holes for them to fall through. What happens to people when more unnecessary obstacles are placed in front of them on their path to success? The big banks want us to help them out in tough times, after having made extremely irrational lending decisions. But when we need help to pursue a very specific and rational course, the attainment of a college degree, America’s politicians sit in the back of the classroom and nod off to sleep, squandering yet another chance for us to improve ourselves.

It makes one wonder if that might be the whole plan.

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LOST OPPORTUNITIES
What I would have done with $50 million

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

I
n midsummer, Governor Paterson announced that New York State would face a $6 billion budget deficit next year, and called the Legislature back to Albany for an emergency session. The only lasting solution to New York’s frequent budget shortfalls is to restructure the tax system for greater fairness and more revenue. But Paterson has so far refused to consider even such short-term solutions as a temporary surcharge on New York’s millionaires and resorting instead to gouging the budgets of health care and higher education.

CUTS OK’D

A centerpiece of his proposal was a $56.6 million cut to CUNY – part of a program of 7% reductions across the board. But for CUNY that cut comes on top of a $17.7 million cut this spring and two decades of underfunding before that – a record that has earned New York last place among the 50 states in the trend of per capita spending on public higher education.

Initially, many legislators appeared willing to resist the governor’s cuts on principle. But as the August 18 session neared, they received word from Chancellor Goldstein that CUNY could, in Goldstein’s words, “minimize the impact” of the reduction. Goldstein told legislators, as he wrote later in his public message, that this huge cut to CUNY’s budget could be absorbed by unused reserve funds, a “temporary vacancy control program” in administrative hiring, various other one-time cuts and an $8 million cut to the “Other than Personnel Services” budget (OTPS).

Albany got the message, and the cut to CUNY passed by a landslide, with only 10 members of the Assembly and six of the Senate dissenting. Several legislators I spoke to afterwards used the same phrase: their own opposition melted because Goldstein “agreed to” the cut. Both the Legislature and the governor should be held accountable for underfunding CUNY once again, but special responsibility falls on CUNY’s central administration. While I appreciate Goldstein’s pledge not to cut faculty hires and not to renege on the 100 new Lecturer positions agreed to with the contract, as well as his limitation of most of the cuts to the reserve, the message his administration sent to Albany gave the legislators permission to cut CUNY.

Perhaps at Sixth and Broadway, where supplies never run low and salaries for management are well into the six figures, a multimillion dollar cut in OTPS funds does not feel like a crisis. But people on the campuses know that CUNY cannot afford a cut of even one dollar to its budget, much less $50 million. For us, the impact of the cut will not be minimal. Few things create more daily misery than the lack of equipment, books and supplies, and some campuses have made even sharper cuts, cancelling courses because of lack of funds. Chancellor Goldstein may think that CUNY can do without that $50 million, but I doubt that many of us would agree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Instead of returning the $50 million to Albany, Goldstein could have preserved the OTPS budget, removed the freeze on administrative hiring, restored the courses cancelled because of lack of funds, and put the reserve funds to good use – addressing some of the routine indignities of CUNY life. These are some of the things on my own list.

• Fix every leak in every ceiling in every CUNY building, eliminating the hundreds of white plastic buckets that appear whenever there is a heavy rainfall and the growth of mold.
• Establish a two-year pilot program to cut class size in half, then measure the effect on student retention and achievement, faculty satisfaction and research productivity.
• Provide a major infusion of funding to the PSC-CUNY research awards and other professional development funds, quadrupling the money available for research support.
• Triple the amount of travel money available to support participation in academic conferences and the reassigned time for un-sponsored research.
• Supply a “cultural passport” to New York City for every student – not just those in the Honors College.
• Create a fund to support recruitment of a faculty as diverse as the student body.
• End, once and for all, CUNY’s indefensible failure to pay adjuncts at five colleges for the full amount they earn during the fifteenth week of the semester.
• Experiment with hiring adequate numbers of staff in the registrar’s office, financial aid and other offices that serve students.
• Fund the college libraries so they can catch up on book acquisitions stalled by years of budget cuts.
• Spend a few million dollars to install drinking fountains in every CUNY building – and make sure that all of them are working.
• Stop nickel-and-dime us with what’s on YOUR list?

We suspect that everyone at CUNY is carrying around a mental list of what could have been done with the $50 million CUNY returned to the State this August. Perhaps Chancellor Goldstein needs ideas. Send your own personal wish list to Goldstein, along with the message that next time budget cuts are discussed in Albany, CUNY should take the position that a not a single dollar should be cut. The union Web site, www.psc-cuny.org, has a letter ready for you to send and to amplify with a list of your own.

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What’s on YOUR list?

Cuts will be felt on campus

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