

CUNY is not family friendly

KEENA LIPSITZ is an assistant professor of political science at Queens College.



Keena Lipsitz of Queens College

You might have noticed on the video that I have a seven-month-old daughter. She is at home tonight with my husband, where she spent all day today and yesterday, because he teaches at a university that offers parental leave. So I'm here to make a point about why you should care about winning parental leave in this contract.

As a new mother and parental leave activist, I've heard a lot of maternity leave horror stories recently. I know a woman who had to lead a seminar 11 days after she gave birth because she felt like she couldn't say no to her chair. I know another woman who had her child during her first year at CUNY and as a result was not covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act, so she lost her insurance when she took leave and had to pay \$1,000 per month in COBRA payments, on top of not receiving a salary, so her family would have medical insurance.

I also know a woman who had her baby in the middle of a semester and because her chair didn't want to deal with finding adjuncts to teach her courses in the middle of the semester, he gave her the whole semester off, which sounds like a pretty good deal.

'TIME YOUR BABY'

But I also know another woman in the same division and at the same school who actually timed her pregnancy for the beginning of the summer. How many women here have been told you should *time* your pregnancies? [Laughter] Mother Nature's not so cooperative sometimes. But she did, and she was finishing up grading when she was going into labor. And because she had timed her pregnancy properly she didn't get any special deal.

So this is the reality of how maternity leave works in the CUNY system. It's unfair, it's unjust and it's just plain behind the times. When I was on the job market, I interviewed at five schools – and of the five schools, public and private, CUNY was the only one that did not offer a semester of paid maternity leave, if not parental leave. Most of the other schools in the New York area – Columbia, NYU, the New School, Fordham – they all offer some form of paid parental leave.

Other universities offer paid parental leave – but CUNY does not.

The point is, if you're not moved to fight for parental leave by the human rights argument, if you're not moved by the equity and basic fairness argument, then you should be moved by the recruitment and retention argument. How can CUNY hire the best and the brightest when it can't convince potential hires that it's a family-friendly place to work?

And last, but not least, think about our students. We owe it to them to guarantee that they're going to have the same instructor throughout the semester. But the way the Family and Medical Leave Act works, they have to start the semester with one instructor and end with another. We owe it to them to provide continuity of instruction.

So please, if you care about social justice, if you care about gender equity, if you care about hiring the best at CUNY and if you care about the students, tell the administration we need a decent parental leave policy in this contract.



FRANK KIRKLAND, chair of the philosophy department at Hunter.

I have served as chairperson of the philosophy department at Hunter College for ten years. Of course I am concerned about CUNY's demands to remove chairpersons from our union. This is not the first time that management has raised this demand. However, I believe this is the first time management has been strong and relentless in pursuing it at the bargaining table. The PSC has good reason to be strong in their efforts to remove this demand from the table. Removing chairpersons from the union would [make them] beholden much less to the faculty who would elect them than to the superiors who would appoint them.

Union members SPEAK OUT

Job security and promotions for HEOs

DONNA GILL is a higher education officer assistant (HEO) at Hunter College and a Cross-Campus Officer on the PSC Executive Council.

I've worked at Hunter College for 20 years, in various offices and various capacities – in the bursar's office, the registrar's office, financial aid. Many HEOs do similar work across the campus. But despite our hard work, day in and day out, we only receive job security, which is called 13.3b, after eight years. I like to call it "pseudo-tenure." I call it pseudo-tenure because if you receive three unsatisfactory annual evaluations you can be terminated, even after 20 years. Now, in this round of bargaining, management wants to weaken this pseudo-tenure and make it easier for them to terminate HEOs.

So I believe that CUNY is headed in the wrong direction. It is the wrong direction for HEOs – and also for departments, for the college and most of all it's the wrong direction for our students. Our students depend upon us to stick up for them. We work long and hard hours, even extra hours, to go the extra mile for them. Management does not want to pay for the extra hours we work, so we've actually had to take management to court just to get paid for our time.

I'm proud to be part of this union, pushing CUNY to do the right thing, the right thing for us, the right thing for the students and

the right thing for the University. We cannot be nationally competitive and serve our students if we are overworked, underpaid and under-promoted.

In the HEO ranks, promotion does not exist. In order to be "re-classified," you have to show that your job has significantly changed and become a higher-level position over the period that you've been there. Despite the fact that members' jobs have changed a lot over the years, especially with increased use of computers, you still cannot get promoted.

STUCK

Case in point: on certain campuses we have members who were hired as an assistant to HEO, and 20 years later they are still an assistant to HEO. Their jobs have changed, but they're stuck at the top of their salary scale – and you saw the assistant to HEO salary scale in Steve London's presentation, so you know what kind of salaries we're talking about. After 20 years on the job, and long before that, CUNY should recognize their growth with better titles and promotions, to make this a better place for the students and for ourselves.

As HEOs, we know that there's a lot at stake in this round of bargaining. We are behind the union and the bargaining team 100%. We are enforcing our contract, and we are fighting for a fair contract settlement.



COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS, assistant professor of social science at City Tech and a PSC delegate.

So what's management up to these days? They want to do away with the step system for faculty. They want to remove department chairs from the union. And they want to weaken job security for Higher Education Officers. These demands are unacceptable. These demands add up to a restructuring of CUNY that increases the administration's power at the expense of those of us who do the real work that keeps this institution going. We have to mobilize on our campuses so that this does not happen. Let's stand up for our students. Let's stand up for the CUNY of our dreams.



MARCIA NEWFIELD, adjunct lecturer in English at BMCC and PSC vice president for part-time personnel.

Even though I've taught at BMCC for 20 years I can never be sure that I'll have a job the next semester. Thousands of adjuncts serving this University for decades are in the same position. We know our departments, we know our subjects, we know how to guide and advise students and we care. I repeat, we care. And that's why we stay here working for poverty wages, teaching ten courses a year for under \$30,000 a year. CUNY would not have survived without us.... Job security for adjuncts would be to everyone's benefit. It ensures a more stable department, reduces the burden on chairs and full-time faculty members, and provides continuity for our students.



Donna Gill of Hunter College talks about HEO issues.

S OUT

PSC members from different campuses spoke at the October 30 mass meeting about key contract issues; these pages present some of their remarks. News coverage of the mass meeting appears on page 3.

If you have a comment on an issue in the current round of bargaining, consider writing a letter to Clarion. (See page 2 for where to send it, and remember our limit is 200 words.)



Nancy Thompson, an adjunct lecturer in English at Medgar Evers, makes a point during the October 30 mass meeting.

Parity in health benefits for adjuncts and grad assistants

NANCY THOMPSON is an adjunct lecturer at Medgar Evers College and City Tech and has taught English at Medgar Evers since 1989:

Brother and sister colleagues, my name is Nancy Thompson and I am proud to represent the adjuncts of Medgar Evers College. My CUNY namesake, Medgar Wiley Evers, was martyred during the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. He is a venerated ancestor to people all over this land because he stood for and died for equality, dignity and empowerment for all Americans, the vast majority of whom are people like ourselves, American workers.

ACHIEVEMENTS DISRESPECTED

Brother and sister colleagues, our University's administration spent tens of thousands of dollars on a recent advertising campaign which celebrates the achievements of a few select faculty, because they want New Yorkers to believe that we are a great school, worthy of being a public university

of the wealthiest and most influential city in the western hemisphere. And yet this same administration disrespects the daily achievements of the majority of their instructional staff – the men and women who work as adjuncts and graduate assistants, the American workers who teach and coach and guide and develop the skills and talents of the students we serve. We must study for years to achieve advanced degrees and publish and create new curricula, the same way our full-time colleagues do.

We carry the "mother load" of course work for this University – and yet how is it that we are faced with retirements that include no health care coverage? And how is it that graduate students who work as adjunct instructors receive no coverage at all? The public University of the City of New York deserves to be, indeed must become, the great institution the administration and their Madison Avenue spinners want others to

think it is. But honorable people know that greatness will never belong to this school until all its workers are treated with respect.

NYC INCLUSION

That is why in this round of talks the union is demanding the City include eligible part-timers in the New York City Health Benefits Program. [Applause] I call on you, brother and sister colleagues, to support your union in achieving victory. Write, call, sign the petitions, do whatever you must do to win that which is rightfully yours.

"We face retirements that include no health care coverage."

Brother and sister colleagues, more than 40 years ago, Medgar Wiley Evers, a man who faced death every day, said to the world, "You can kill a man, but you can't kill an idea." Parity in health benefits is an idea whose time has come. Acting in strength and unity we will succeed in making that idea a reality. My name is Nancy Thompson and I thank you for your time.



Penny Lewis describes how CUNY discourages its junior faculty.

Salaries fall short, and that hurts CUNY

PENNY LEWIS is an instructor in sociology at Borough of Manhattan Community College and coordinator of the Writing Across the Curriculum program at BMCC:

No one I know came to CUNY for the money. [Laughter] But the lack of money is driving people away. In the three years I've taught here full-time I've seen literally dozens of our colleagues leave, including nearly a third of the recent hires in my department.

The conditions of scarcity that send new faculty walking are more complex than just those salaries and we're all familiar with their general contours – an unmanageable workload, a lack of appreciation from many administrators, and, as some of my BMCC colleagues have named them, the "petty indignities" that we face everyday. Yet our low salaries put a number on the lack of respect that CUNY management has for us, and act as a tangible block on our ability to do our work well – let alone live our lives well.

UNAFFORDABLE

Last week I visited another department to encourage people to come [to the mass meeting] tonight, and I talked to a junior faculty member whom I'd never met before. He told me that he liked the idea of reassigned time for junior faculty research. But the problem was that if he took his reassigned time, he couldn't teach an overload that same semester. An overload, for anyone here who doesn't know, is an additional class on top of your basic course load.

We already teach 27 hours at the community colleges, in classes that have grown so big they're often filled beyond capacity. The reassigned time that we want should be a blessing for our research and our teaching. But my colleague –

and there are others like him – feels he can't afford it. He's got a family, he lives in New York City, and he needs the money.

So because we don't have the money, junior faculty give up reassigned time. We don't attend

"We're forced to make choices that breed cynicism."

conferences, we teach summers, we curtail or give up ambitious research, we take on other work for pay. We go into debt while teaching here, like my colleague who is just up for tenure who recently couldn't afford to fix her car. Forget your root

canal, housing, preschool for your kids. It's true.

EVERYONE LOSES

At CUNY we're forced to make choices that breed cynicism. Students versus research, research versus money, money versus students, family versus everything else. Little by little, everyone loses. So CUNY loses too. Stressed out, overworked, underpaid junior faculty are not what I would put on a recruiting poster. [Applause] We have a revolving door of students, many of whom stick it out, but, at least at BMCC, most of whom leave.

A non-tenured faculty member told our college president at a recent meeting, "BMCC was not my school of last resort. I want to teach here. I want to be part of CUNY. I hope I can afford to stay."

Well, many can't afford it, and morale is a problem for the people who stay. Morale is high when we can do our work well and when we're recognized for it.

And basically that's what we're fighting for in this contract. We're fighting for the only retention plan for students and faculty that makes sense. Real salary increases and a long-term commitment to reverse decades of underfunding can make CUNY a place where faculty and students stay and thrive.