

February 26, 2009

Chancellor Matthew Goldstein  
City University of New York  
535 East 80<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10075

Dear Chancellor Goldstein:

I write on behalf of the leadership of the Professional Staff Congress in response to the “concept paper” on a new community college. I am grateful to Vice Chancellor Silverblatt for providing us with a copy of the August 15, 2008 draft of the document.

The PSC welcomes academic innovation and strongly supports the goal of better serving the people of New York through community college education. We share the proposal’s sense of urgency about enabling more students to achieve the college degree. As you know, the union has a deep interest in student retention, especially as it is affected by differences in race, ethnicity and family income. In part to address this issue, the PSC proposed a new contractual provision in the last round of collective bargaining for a pilot project on student mentoring, and we are delighted that the University accepted that proposal as part of the final agreement.

The concept paper, however, raises several concerns. First, we strongly object to the University’s failure to include the University-wide PSC leadership in the discussions that led to its development. To develop a 120-page “concept paper” that makes frequent reference to new roles for faculty and staff without ever consulting the elected representatives of the instructional staff on issues of terms and conditions of employment is disrespectful to the people the union represents.

It is also counterproductive. The concept paper would have been strengthened by including the PSC leadership—and the University Faculty Senate—from the outset, rather than forcing the elected representatives of the faculty and staff to add our comments after the fact. We are grateful that a number of individual faculty and staff members, invited by management, added their comments during the conceptualization process, and we are sure that their participation enriched the final product. But soliciting individual comments is no substitute for including elected representatives.

One source of our concern is the effect the concept paper sometimes has of devaluing the work of current faculty and staff. We assume this was not its intention, but comments such as the following, in the section on “Professional and Curriculum Development,” are troubling: “The kind of teaching required will represent a significant departure from traditional classroom practice, which is most often an isolated and isolating activity . . .” (p. 27). The implication is that teaching in a way that is *not* “isolated and isolating” would be something new. Where is the recognition that CUNY’s community colleges include nationally known experts on interactive

pedagogy? Or that many of our faculty have been practicing innovative, participatory methods of teaching for decades? The concept paper seems to disregard their expertise.

Despite our concerns, we approach the concept paper open to considering any changes that would benefit students. We hope, however, that the proposal does not offer merely a cosmetic solution to a structural problem. According to the Fiscal Policy Report published last month, New York State support for CUNY community colleges on a per-FTE basis has fallen by 26 percent since 1991/92. Only 38 percent of the faculty at the CUNY community colleges are full-time. Sixty-two percent of CUNY community college students come from households whose annual income is under \$30,000 (*2008 Student Experience Survey*). We suspect that student retention would be dramatically improved if the burden of tuition on students were lightened, class size reduced, and the percentage of full-time faculty doubled. CUNY has an extraordinary part-time faculty, but a largely part-time faculty is structurally unable to provide the continuity and one-on-one attention students need to succeed.

The concept paper also raises a number of specific questions concerning terms and conditions of employment, including but not limited to the following:

- The concept paper is unclear on the manner in which the new community college would use existing instructional staff titles, as specified in Article 1 of the collective bargaining agreement. We would like clarification.
- The concept paper does not specify that the faculty of the new community college would be employed in tenure-bearing titles. Given that several of the majors envisioned for the new community college are not in traditional academic fields—Supply Chain Management, for example—we would like clarification of whether the University plans to employ traditionally credentialed faculty in these fields.
- What is the expectation with respect to employment of faculty and professional staff in part-time or hourly positions at the new community college?
- Article 18 of the contract includes “course and curricula development” in the list of elements that may be considered when evaluating teaching faculty. Page 28 of the concept paper speaks of a “curriculum team” that will consider proposed curriculum. The document continues, “The goal of this collaboration is not to control faculty and their curricula, but to regularize a process whereby all faculty and staff have a role in promoting the highest quality learning experiences . . . .” We would like clarification of the expectations of professional autonomy for the faculty with respect to curriculum development.
- Given the contract’s opening statement that the parties “seek to maintain and encourage, in accordance with law, full freedom of inquiry, teaching, research and publication of results,” how does the proposed new community college intend to protect academic freedom and professional autonomy?

- Given the concept paper’s emphasis on student advisement, what are the plans for employment and workload of faculty counselors and counselors in higher education officer series titles? Article 14.3 of the contract specifies the period of annual leave for faculty counselors: we would like clarification of how the new community college would adhere to this provision, in the light of its plans for summer programs.
- We would also like clarification of the intention on workload for other teaching faculty. Pages 22-27 of the concept paper propose a semester that will be 16 weeks in length. How is this lengthened semester consistent with the current contractual provisions on workload?
- The concept paper also refers to “significant instructional intensity over the first year of study (at least 135 hours/semester—200% more time—of math and quantitative reasoning)” (p. 22-23). We would like clarification of how this expectation adheres to the provisions of Article 15 on workload and of Appendix A, the Workload Settlement Agreement.
- Page 29 of the concept paper describes an annual “Summer Institute” that appears to include both faculty and staff. What are the plans for aligning this expectation with the provision in Article 14.1 of the collective bargaining agreement for annual leave for the full-time teaching faculty? Is there an expectation that part-time faculty, adjunct college laboratory technicians and/or non-teaching adjuncts would participate in the “Summer Institute”? If so, what are the plans for compensation for their participation?
- Page 25 of the concept paper describes an elaborate process for determining the number of credits a student receives for the first-year courses, and states that a “faculty team” will award credit on “a sliding scale.” Are there implications of this proposal for the calculation of *faculty* teaching contact hours, as referenced in Appendix A of the collective bargaining agreement?
- The concept paper does not discuss departmental organization and governance, or the role of department chairs. We would like clarification of these areas, given their relevance to the contractual provisions on evaluation, observation and other areas.
- Section VII of the concept paper discusses “Accountability,” with a heavy emphasis on testing. It describes “a whole college approach to accountability” and proposes to “locate accountability and institutional research in a Center for College Effectiveness.” This appears to bypass the department chair and, in the case of professional staff, the chairperson or supervisor, who have responsibility for evaluation under Article 18 of the contract. We would like clarification of the plan on evaluation.

- The same section of the concept paper lays out goals for testing of each cohort of students, and then observes that “these are realistic yet ambitious goals that can be realized only if the whole college is mobilized to achieve them” (p. 53). How does the concept paper envision “mobilizing” the faculty and professional staff to achieve certain student test results?
- The section of the concept paper on “Facilities” describes a physical “hub” in the campus, and then states that the hub “will serve as a space where the college’s faculty and staff spend time learning and working” (p. 61). We would like clarification of whether there is an expectation that faculty will be required to work for a certain period of time in a specific location outside of the classroom or laboratory.

We are confident that some of these questions can be successfully resolved, but we regret that we did not have a chance to raise them during the conceptualization stage of the process. It would have been much more efficient to discuss them before the concept paper was made public. Nevertheless, we seek an opportunity to discuss these and other questions with you before any further progress is made on the proposal.

Discussion becomes particularly urgent now, as CUNY seeks and secures private funding to support the proposed new community college. We assume that CUNY will not move forward with any plans to establish a new college without discussion with the union. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Barbara Bowen  
President

cc: Pamela Silverblatt, Vice Chancellor for Labor Relations  
John Mogulescu, Senior University Dean for Academic Affairs  
Manfred Philipp, Chair, University Faculty Senate  
Delegates, Professional Staff Congress