When it comes to adjunct pension benefits, you get back a lot more than you put in. All of it, though, is money that you've earned. Don't leave it in CUNY’s pocket – sign up now.

Deal on health care for City workers

The Municipal Labor Committee reaches a deal with the City to save the PICA specialized drug program and protect health benefits. Costs to members, though, will go up.

In the next contract, management wants to reorganize CUNY along corporate lines. That means getting rid of salary steps, cuts in annual leave, keeping department chairs out of the union and shifting health care costs to employees. The PSC is pushing for a different approach – a university based on professional autonomy, competitive salaries, enhanced benefits, reasonable workloads and support for personal and family life. Above, PSC member Renate Bridenthal makes a point at a contract campaign meeting on December 8. Find out how you can get involved.

A bill now in Congress would create a government panel to monitor international area studies programs. Does this add up to an attack on academic freedom?
Chancellor underpaid?

If you compare Chancellor Goldstein’s $500,000 to that of other higher education leaders, you might wonder why he didn’t get an even larger increase. Mary Sue Coleman’s salary at the University of Michigan is, with benefits, $677,500. Shirley Ann Jackson at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a school with 6,300 students, earns $677,500. Coleman’s salary at the University of Michigan is, with benefits, $891,400.

While I say this with my sense of irony intact, don’t CUNY administrators also deserve compensation and working conditions that benefit us all and meet larger goals.

John Gallagher

Debate on critical choices

September 11 changed our lives. After the most brutal attacks on civilians in our history, none of us feel very secure. We are upred and overwhelmed by the latent threat of further terrorism. We see, moreover, a further threat in many of the actions and policies with which our government has responded.

At home, the PATRIOT Act is a sweeping attack on our basic constitutional rights. Are we to defend ourselves by sacrificing our most precious freedoms?

Abroad, the war in Iraq is a conventional military action with very limited support from our allies. Will this defeat terrorism?

Finally, there is another war which we have been losing, the war on poverty and ignorance. Must social programs be sacrificed, particularly, those for our students?

We realize that in the new world environment, our country faces difficult choices, but choices which, if we are to remain a democracy, must be publicly articulated and discussed. It is the task of universities serving as sites for such discussion. The PSC should promote open public examination of the issues of war and peace, government policy and social justice.

John Mineka

Where’s the “Universitas”?

The outrageous increases accorded top administrators represent the corporate character of higher education.

In the High Middle Ages in Bologna, Padua, Cambridge and Oxford, the “Universitas” was controlled by the faculty, sometimes in cooperation with the students in a concept known as Universitas. The growth of science and technology, particularly in the German University, began to increase the bureaucracy. Now we have ended up with a Board of Trustees choosing administartive officers with power over faculty and students, instead of providing faculties to enhance teaching and learning.

At City University this resulted in the end of free tuition and open admissions, as well as the increasingly conservative and reactionary nature of the Board of Trustees. At one time we had two representatives of organized labor on the Board of Higher Education (predecessor of CUNY’s Trustees): David Sullivan, president of the Building Service Employees Union, and Ben McLaurin of the Service Car Carriers, an associate of A. Philip Randolph. Legislation should be introduced to have the University Faculty Senate provide advice and consent in the selection of CUNY’s Trustees.

At present the PSC, as collective bargaining agent, is the major countering force against the unwieldy power of the Board and its outrageously well-paid coterie of administrators.

Israel Klugler

PSC Deputy President Emeritus

Learning from CUNY’s history

My exhibit at CCNY, “Challenges to Free Speech and Academic Freedom at CCNY: 1880-2000” focuses on the militant student and faculty activism of the 1930s at CCNY, as well as the repression against both groups. Student protest against militarism and fascism led to the suspension or expulsion of many student leaders, and the banning of organizations and publications during the early 1930s. However it was the power of the student movement, together with unions, that prevented the dismissal of politically active union members at CCNY in 1936.

During the second half of the 1930s, the New York College Teachers Union at the municipal colleges won the right to tenure for all full-time faculty, the right to elect department chairs, as well as faculty control over curricular matters. This union became the target of the Rapp-Coudert Committee, a State legislative body which conducted an investigation of “communist subversion” in the schools and colleges of New York (1940-42). Over 50 CCNY staff and faculty and two Brooklyn College faculty lost their jobs because of their refusal to cooperate with this committee. This was the largest political purge of faculty in the country, and it paved the way for the McCarthyism of the 1950s.

Carol Smith

Baruch College

PSC has wrong agenda

As a CLT and PSC member at CCIQ, I await with anticipation your reaction on the errors you raised about concerning the tuition increase. Your insistence that enrollment would dramatically drop was wrong. Your rhetoric is only heightened by your histrionics.

CUNY is still the bargain in town and the increase amounts to no more than a few dollars spent on compact discs and a cell phone bill for a month. Students can make their own choices in these matters. Financial aid is readily available for those who need it. Please use your available resources to meet your needs as an employee of CUNY, as it is not your job to save the world.

Furthermore, attacks against TIAA-CREF and trying to force them to divest in anything is against my better interests. There is a Social Choice Account for those who choose it. The same opportunity should be available for those who do not. As self-appointed champions of diversity and choice this should be obvious.

I know my letter will fall upon deaf ears. Should you decide to print it, I will await retribution for not thinking correctly.

John Funk

PSC

Clarion editor Peter Hogness resposes:

For: From exacting retribution, I would encourage all PSC members to use the letters column to express their views. Just remember that we’ve got a 200-word limit.

The debate – or argument – among your members is being echoed in white-collar unions everywhere. I’m glad to see that PSC’s leadership recognizes that the only lasting solution is to fight on behalf of all workers within a profession, not just the most privileged. The alternative simply plays into the hands of those whose ultimate goal is to have no unions at all.

Andy Zipper, Editor, The Guild Reporter

The Newspaper Guild-CWA
GOING BANKRUPT
in health insurance coverage.
December 18 on a range of changes
administration reached agreement
icipal unions and the Bloomberg
plan about to run out of funds, mu-
With a popular prescription drug

By PETER HOGNESS
City, unions reach health deal

With a popular prescription drug

GHI/Blue Cross (CBP) plan changes –
effective April 1

The co-payments for a primary care office visit increased from $10 to $15.
The co-payment for a specialist office visit increased from $10 to $20.
The co-payment for each diagnostic service (e.g., lab test, x-ray) increased from $10 to $15.
The in-patient hospital deductible increased to $300 per admission with an annual maximum deductible of $750.

GHI/Blue Cross Senior Care Program changes – effective April 1

The annual medical deductible increased to $150.
The in-patient hospital deductible increased to $300 with annual maximum deductible of $750.

Changes to PICA program – effective April 1

New 3-tier co-payments:
$5 for generic drugs
$15 for preferred drugs
$35 for non-preferred drugs

Mandatory mail order after 1st refill – $10 (generic) / $30 (preferred) / $70 (non-preferred) for a 90-day supply.

Some new procedures for specific medications.

For more information go to www.ghi.com or call 212-501-4444.

On the plus side for the unions, the agreement achieves those goals. It stabilizes both PICA and municip-
al health insurance, and gives much-needed support to the union welfare funds that pay for other prescription drugs. The City’s de-
mands for broad conces-
sions were rejected, and all money from the additional co-pays and the annual fee will go back into workers’ health insurance – none of it can be used by Bloomberg for other pur-
ses such as balancing the City budget.

A deal on health care for City workers will keep the PICA program, maintain ben-
efits and help union welfare funds. At the table at a recent MLC negotiating ses-
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The PSC bargaining team reported on the status of contract negotiations at a December open house with union members at the Hunter School of Social Work. A lively discussion addressed both union and management demands, and how the PSC’s contract campaign could win the best possible settlement.

“CUNY management wants a ‘university’ with all the hallmarks of a top-down corporation,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. She pointed to features of corporatization such as eliminating salary steps; putting all discretion for raises in the hands of college presidents; cuts in annual leave; excluding department chairs from union; shift of health care costs from employer to employee; and weakening union rights in grievances.

Bargaining timeline

An outline of negotiating sessions for a new University-wide agreement held between the PSC and CUNY management in 2003:

**May 23:** PSC presents management with demands as approved by Delegate Assembly. Discussion of ground rules. CUNY management seeks “confidentiality, three days’ written notice of PSC members attending as observers, and limits on use of notes taken during sessions.

**June 9:** PSC negotiators discuss talks with union members at the Hunter College. A lively discussion at a December open house was held.

**June 25:** PSC rejects confidentiality, three days’ written notice of PSC members at attending as observers, and limits on use of notes taken during sessions.

PSC negotiators reject these conditions, explaining that they have promised openness in negotiations and access for rank-and-file observers.

**June 29:** PSC explains its agenda: a comprehensive renewal of CUNY through improved salaries and conditions of work throughout CUNY.

**June 25:** Management abruptly cancels session, in retaliation for faculty and staff protests against CUNY’s tuition increase. The PSC criticized this as a violation of state law on public-sector bargaining.

**July 17:** Agreement reached on ground rules. Management presents its 49 demands, says its key goals are “flexibility, opportunity and productivity.” PSC urges immediate acceptance of union demands on affirmative action, hiring current part-time faculty for full-time positions and hiring of faculty counselors, as professional autonomy, competitive salaries, enhanced benefits, reasonable workloads, and supports for professional and family life.” Faculty and staff were incensed at management’s demands. “If I tell my department that steps will be removed, there will be a mini-revolution,” said Stuart Scharf of Brooklyn College.

CUNY’s demand to cut back on annual leave for full-time faculty – ending it by August 15 – drew fire for putting management control ahead of professional needs. Faculty said they needed this time to do research, given the heavy teaching load they should in the Fall and Spring. “CUNY management has a clear agenda, and one of its features is hostility to academic work,” said PSC Treasurer John Hyland in the bargaining team’s presentation.

Schaaf said that he would spread the word among his colleagues about management’s demands, adding, “Then I’ll ask them, ‘What are you willing to do about it?’” To win a good contract, he said, members have to be willing to get involved.

PSC bargaining team members agreed. Local organizing on the campuses and in departments will play a key role, said team member Andrew McMenemy of Bronx Community College. “What would a contract campaign on your campus look like?” he urged members at the open house to consider.

Pledge cards were circulated with a range of ways to take part in the union’s contract campaign, and members checked off one or more boxes to indicate what they could do. (See “15-Minute Activist,” below.) “Everyone can do something in this campaign,” noted Iris Deluto, a HEO at Queens College, in the bargaining team’s report. “Make one phone call, send one fax, talk to one colleague, fight for one issue on your campus.”

Union negotiators stressed that the quality of the contract will depend on the pressure that faculty and staff apply. “We can argue for the demands, but the more we have members pushing for our demands, the more powerful we will be,” said team member Michael Fabricant of Hunter College.

Library faculty member Bonnie Nelson said that when CUNY executives received their recent raises, they were benefiting from the work done by faculty and staff. “That performance increase – everything presidents have to produce comes from this bargaining unit,” she said. “They have to increase our salary and benefits.”

**ADJUNCTS**

Holly Clark, an adjunct at John Jay, spoke to the lack of job security among part-time faculty. “To have a situation where adjuncts are hired and fired every semester is humiliating,” she said. The insecure condition of adjuncts affects teaching and learning at CUNY in broader ways, Clark added: “We have the illusion that there is academic freedom, [but] half of the faculty doesn’t have academic freedom.”

Allen Freedman of City Tech urged the bargaining team to push hard for lowering the teaching contact hours of City Tech faculty. “We are heralded by the University as a senior college, but not treated as such,” he said, referring to his school’s 26-hour teaching load.

Negotiating team member Anne Friedman noted that workload is an issue affecting all CUNY faculty and staff, and urged members from City Tech to get active with the contract campaign. “We need a groundswell from City Tech, because no one will fight for them if they’re not willing to fight for themselves.”

To give members a sense of what it’s actually like at the bargaining table, team members enacted a scene from recent negotiations by reading from their notes, with Steve Trimble and John Hyland reading the statements of management. This role reversal provoked some chuckles, but the real laughs came from management’s intransigence.

Gains won in the last contract should give members reason for hope. “The last contract brought us salary increases, reassigned time for junior faculty, professional development for HOEs and CLTs, paid office hours for thousands of adjuncts, workload reductions at COSS and City Tech and other improvements,” Bowen said. Even when faced with a tough budget picture, she argued, this shows it is possible to win changes that start to transform the University.

**Union contract campaign**

The PSC contract campaign is getting under way, and your participation is critical. Whether the PSC wins a favorable contract depends on one key thing: how many members get involved. And it’s not hard to do. You can join the contract campaign by pledging to do just one simple task: you can send an e-mail to CUNY management, make five phone calls, attend one campaign event, or other easy tasks. Please go online at www.psc-cuny.org/contract campaign.htm to print out a pledge card and mail it in, or call the PSC office at 212-354-1252 to get one sent to you.
CCNY elects officers

Amid the cheer of a holiday party on December 18, PSC members at CCNY elected new chapter officers and heard from union representatives about health and safety issues, grievances and contract negotiations.

Steve Leberstein, a history professor at CCNY's Center for Worker Education, is the new chapter chair. This post had been vacant since Spring 2003, when the previous chair resigned. Leberstein pledged to build a “pro-active” chapter to improve working conditions on campus.

Other new officers are Eugene Nesbitt, secretary; Laura Hinton and Alice Baldwin-Jones, officers-at-large; and Rob Wallace, alternate delegate. There were no opposing candidates. Previously elected officers who will continue to serve are Seth Rosenberg, vice chair, and Bill Crain, delegate.

The dilapidated state of the Mar- shall Science Building (see p. 7) is a major concern at CCNY and has helped to revitalize the faculty chapter, according to HEO Chapter Chair Jean Weisman, who works at CCNY. Weisman noted that in November, when the position of faculty chapter chair was vacant, leaders of the Reg- istrars, HEO and faculty chapters orga- nized a meeting about the building’s perilous condition. This meet- ing sparked the strong turnout and effective testimony from CCNY fac- ulty, students and staff at a Novem- ber hearing on CCNY’s capital bud- get needs (see p. 7).

HEOs host Barron

As part of an effort to get members more involved with political action, the PSC Higher Education Officers Chapter featured City Council mem- ber Charles Barron as a guest speaker at a recent chapter meeting. Barron is a graduate of Hunter, where the meeting was held. “I was in the SEEK program,” he recalled. “I am a Hunter College student who has become a City Council member and Chair of the Higher Education Committee.”

Opposed to last year’s CUNY tu- ition hike, Barron believes that the University should get rid of tuition altogether. “I’ve been holding hearings on why a tuition-free CUNY aid, plus the amount spent on finan- cial aid, it just doesn’t make sense not to get rid of it.”

Rester Mitchell, who works in in- formation technology at John Jay, asked Barron how things looked for the union’s con- tract negotiations. The City’s budget picture has improved a bit, Barron said. “But even if it looks good, that means nothing,” he remarked. “It’s like a lot of things: it’ll be as good as you make it. The economy can be good and you might not still get what you need – or it can look bad and you can still get it. The point is, you have to struggle and find that, he said, is why it’s important to get involved in political action.

Vera Weekes, a PSC cross-cam- pass officer and HEO grievance coun- selor, is organizing PSC members to make regular lobbying visits to legis- lators’ local offices. “We’re asking constituents to develop an ongoing relationship with their own repre- sentative, as part of a team of peo- ple,” she told Clarion. It’s the kind of grassroots action that will get politi- cians’ attention.

Chapter Chair Jean Weisman, chair of the HEO Chapter, urged HEOs at the October 23 meeting to sign up for VOTE COPE, a program in which PSC members can con- tribute money to support union- backed political candidates.

Just desserts at York

On December 10, the PSC chapter at York College worked with other unions on campus to co-host the “First Multi-Union Gala Pre-Holiday Dessert Fest.” The event was a big success.

Faculty members, HROs and CLOs were joined by custodians, college assistants, campus security, electricians, engineers, laborers, plumbers and more. About 200 peo- ple attended, roughly half of them members of the PSC.

“Chapter Chairman Geron and Peter Hogness.

CHAPTER ROUNDPUP

Rester Mitchell, who works in informa- tion technology, said, “The fact that people from all the other contracts are currently being handled altogether. “I’ve been holding hear- ings on why a tuition-free CUNY aid, plus the amount spent on finan- cial aid, it just doesn’t make sense not to get rid of it.”

Eduige Coleman, a pro- fessor of foreign lan- guages, told Clarion, “It was very informal, just casual and friendly, but a lot of infor- mation and ideas got exchanged at these events,” she said. “I socialized, but I also did some business.”

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Chapter Chairman Geron and Peter Hogness.
Council questions exec raises

By PETER HOGNESS

“I just finished paying my bill at the bursar’s office, so I can’t pay rent for two months,” said Hunter College student Tameika Beyer. After struggling to pay a 25% tuition increase, Beyer said she was angry about CUNY’s recent decision to hand out raises to its top executives.

Beyer spoke at a December 5 City Council Higher Education Committee hearing. “Two million dollars is a lot of money,” she said. “That’s money that I won’t see, that students who are crying while they stand in line at Financial Aid won’t see.” The justification for the tuition increase sounds hollow in the wake of the pay hikes, Beyer said. “I can’t say ‘fiscal crisis’ on the one hand and then give these raises with the other – it just doesn’t add up!”

$2.1 MILLION

At issue was the October 27 vote by the Board of Trustees to award pay hikes of 6% to 19% to the nine vice chancellors at 80th Street, and a 40% raise – to $150,000 – to Chancellor Matthew Goldstein. College presidents got increases of 3.2% to 9%, and the total cost of all raises was put at $2.1 million. The Chancellor’s housing allowance of $80,000 per year was unaffected, as were housing allowances received by various college presidents.

James Blake, a member of the counseling faculty at BMCC, questioned the sense of priorities that lay behind the decision. “At BMCC we have six counselors to serve 19,000 students,” Blake said. The college administration continues to say there is no money to hire more – even though nine BMCC students died in the attack on the World Trade Center, and the students there have been through hell.”

Marcia Newfield, PSC Vice President for Part-Time Affairs, told the panel, “I and thousands of other part-timers who teach at least four courses a semester earn less than $24,000 a year. Many of us – with advanced degrees, scholarly work, and community service – have been serving the university for decades, teaching the majority of entry-level courses.” Yet despite post-graduate degrees and years of dedicated service, she said, “The typical part-time instructor receives annual earnings on a par with fast-food workers.”

“The union is not opposed to the increases for top CUNY managers. We have never contended that only the faculty and staff are deserving of increases. But dramatic increases [for management] at this moment of high unemployment and rising tuition is callous and insensitive. If students are asked to pay more for their education, they have a right to expect more from the University. They should expect to find appropriate equipment in science and computer labs; they should expect to consult the latest, current, and adequate literature, journals and research materials in the libraries. They should expect that class size would be lowered; they should expect that there would be more sections of required courses.

CUNY brass defend pay boost

From left: James Blake, a member of BMCC’s counseling faculty, PSC Secretary and Legislative Coordinator Cecelia McCall, Hunter College student Tameika Beyer.

Testimony by Cecelia McCall

Hughes is an Adjunct Lecturer in English, BMCC/City College:

I teach English to entering students, so I’m one of the first teachers that they have. At BMCC, where I teach remedial English, I’m working with students who have learned to consider education something that is done to them, and then measured in a way that often finds them wanting. Many of them feel themselves disdained just because they’ve been placed in remedial English. It’s up to me to engage them in their own education, to show them that classes can be interesting and rewarding, not another set of exercises irrelevant to everything important to them. This takes skill, patience, humor, intelligence, experience and resilience. It’s a responsibility. I’m a significant factor in whether my students stay in college or wander off to get whatever jobs they can with a high school diploma.

What I’m paid for this work is insulting – not only to me, but to my students. This semester I’ll earn a total of $30,000 for teaching the equivalent of three writing-intensive courses, with weekly papers to correct for each of my 50 students.

Testimony by Ingrid Hughes

The PSC does not believe that management should be underpaid. We have never contended that only the faculty and staff are deserving of increases. But dramatic increases [for management] at this moment of high unemployment and rising tuition is callous and insensitive. If students are asked to pay more for their education, they have a right to expect more from the University. They should expect to find appropriate equipment in science and computer labs; they should expect to consult the latest, current, and adequate literature, journals and research materials in the libraries. They should expect that class size would be lowered; they should expect that there would be more sections of required courses.

Testimony by Victor Ray

Ray is a BMCC Student Senator:

We were told that the tuition hikes were necessary because of a budget deficit. Everyone must sacrifice. And we, as students, must share in this sacrifice. So we students sacrificed time with our families. We worked longer hours to pay inflated tuition. We sacrificed study time, we cut our class loads. We sacrificed so that we could better ourselves, and now we watch our sacrifices fatten the wallets of those who claimed our austerity was a necessary evil.

We don’t have enough full-time faculty, we don’t have enough classrooms, and we at BMCC don’t have enough counselors. President Antonio Perez claims that it does not make financial sense to hire more counselors. My question, to the entire Board of Trustees, is, what financial sense does it make during a time of fiscal crisis to increase your personal profit while crushing your constituents under the weight of your personal gain?

6 NEWS

Clarion | February 2004
CUNY capital budget needs

By ANNE FRIEDMAN
PSC Vice President for Community Colleges

“Start talking, no stalling, CUNY’s funding isapping!” Chanting and carrying signs that read “Invest in CUNY,” PSC picketers greeted people as they arrived for the NY State Assembly Higher Education Committee’s November 25 hearing on the CUNY and SUNY capital budgets. Faculty, students and administrators were all on the same page as they made the case for CUNY’s desperate need for capital funds.

Testimony by Karen Kaplowitz, president of the John Jay Faculty Senate, epitomized crises in overcrowding and fire and safety code violations found on several campuses – problems that are bitternot iron- for John Jay, CUNY’s center for education in fire science. She cited a 1997 evaluation of John Jay’s North Hall by the Chief of Training of the NYC Fire Department, which con- cluded: “This building is too small, ill-equipped, and too dangerous to conduct an academic operation of this size. It is incongruous, if not hypocritical, to deliver fire safety education in such surroundings.”

GOT AIR?

Joan Greenbaum, co-chair of the PSC Health and Safety Committee, testified that there are severe air quality problems throughout the University. Air ducts at BMCC, she said, showed “amounts of lead measuring 100 times the allowable level for window ledges.” While the ducts have been cleaned, she said, BMCC’s ventilation system “cannot handle the number of students and staff now inhabiting this seriously overcrowded building.”

At New York City College of Technology, rainfall regularly creates a giant puddle in the Pearl Building that faculty and staff have named “Lake Pearl.” The ceiling on the building’s dental clinic sprouts mold, which can cause respiratory problems.

FAINTING

Perhaps the day’s most com- pelling testimony came from scien- tists who work in City College’s de- caying Marshak Science Building. “We have had people in this build- ing carrying out on stretchers be- cause they fainted from the fumes,” said Gregory Marshall, professor of biology. Defective fume hoods are only one of several major quality problems throughout the building’s dental clinic sprouts mold, which can cause respiratory problems.

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Noxious fumes

Adapted from testimony of Jane Gallagher, chair of CUNY’s biology department, on CUNY’s Marshak Science Building.

The condition of this building has deteriorated to the point where we are in crisis. We are constantly be- eing showered with massive amounts of black dust that spew from the air ducts. We have had to evacuate classrooms and laborato- ries because of noxious fumes. We have been inundated in water from broken pipes to the point where some buildings have had waterfalls going down the fire stairs from the 13th floor to the basement. Every time it rains, wa- ter seeps from the external bal- conses into the labs. Some labs have growths of species of fungi known to be harmful to human health. We have been unsuccessful in eradicat- ing these fungi.

RAT TRAP

The Department and the College raised money to renovate our facil- ities for maintaining experimental animals. In the process of designing this work, we found that the flow in the building does not meet the minimal federal standards for of lab rats! Most of the funds for the renovation are to redesign and re- construct special air circulation sys- tems for the animals.

The concrete in the building is failing at an alarming rate. The rever- se contributes particles to the black dust that circulates through the building. The emergency brac- ing installed 5 years ago was only designed to last 5 years – we are running out of time.

Perfect storm

Adapted from testimony of Joan Hyland, former PSC Health and Safety Committee.

CUNY’s campuses were largely built during two periods – construc- tion in the 1920s and 1930s and ex- pansion in the 1970s. Buildings from the first period have largely reached the end of their usable lives. Many have been retrofitted so many times for new uses, such as more classes and offices, that they have long since passed the point where evacuation procedures and basic heating and cooling are safe. (But) buildings built in the 1970s are crumbling faster, in many cases, than the older buildings, and have some very serious problems.

Today CUNY is faced with the coming of a perfect storm. The storm is a human creation, brewing from two directions – the first from the crumbling of aging buildings, and the second from the deteriorat- ing health conditions of faculty, staff and students. It is a storm which can and must be prevented.

We believe that the testimony here will strongly urge legislators to resolve to make sure that CUNY gets the capital funds it requires to provide safe and productive work- ing environments for its deserving faculty and students.
against the war and co-sponsored out. Sponsored by US labor active in military families speak McPhearson, a first Gulf War vet slide show of their trip to Baghdad activists who recently returned.

train trade unionists in the United States and around the world marked International Human Rights Day on Dec. 10 with the theme, “Trade union rights are human rights.” In Colombia, a South American country of 42 million people, this slogan is a matter of life and death.

“Stop the killing and impunity in Colombia!” was the demand of a public forum held on December 10 in Geneva at the headquarters of the International Labor Organization (ILO), a UN-affiliated labor rights group. The forum highlighted the fact that in 2002, 344 trade unionists in Colombia for their union activities – 86 percent of all trade unionists murdered in 2002, according to the ILO.

This violence reflects the fact that Colombia is a country torn by social conflict on one hand and an entrenched political and economic elite that has ruled the country for over a century. On the other hand are the tens of millions of Colombians living in poverty, often driven off their land in the countryside to live in growing urban slums outside the capital of Bogota.

Many teachers have been forced to flee Colombia.

Millions of Colombians have taken part in a wide spectrum of actions demanding social justice over the past decade, from petitions to national strikes to rural road blockades to armed insurgency. All of these have been viewed with alarm by Colombia’s elite, and both peaceful protesters and guerrilla soldiers have been met with brutal violence.

Paramilitary death squads, private groups tied to Colombia’s military, have killed tens of thousands of civilians. Educators have faced particular threats. Last October, the teachers union FECODE, a recent labor demonstration in Colombia.

Press Service that 650 teachers and professors have been murdered with impunity over the last decade – 58 since the current president, Alvaro Uribe, took office in 2002. Gloria Ramirez, former general secretary of FECODE, was a featured speaker at the ILO forum in Geneva.

Many teachers have been forced to flee Colombia, especially those who investigate human rights abuses. Juan Carlos Vallejo, a professor of law and human rights, fled to the US in 2002 with the help of the newly-created Scholar Rescue Fund. “In the language of the Colombian establishment, it is common to label those who ask their students to question and think as ‘guerrillas,’”

Hostos student faces new trial

by tomi geron

The long and winding legal journey of Hostos Community College student Miguel Malo took an unexpected turn in mid-December.

As Malo’s trial for allegedly assaulting a campus police officer neared its end, defense attorney Ronald McGuire told the judge that he had been unable to provide his client with effective counsel and asked the court to declare a mistrial. Judge Robert Torres granted the motion on December 18 and gave Malo 45 days to find a new lawyer.

Free speech

Malo was arrested by Hostos security officers in August 2003 during a campus protest against fees for English language classes and cuts in courses taught in Spanish. The original court complaint against Malo states that campus police moved to arrest him when he “began to hold up a sign and protest against the college administration.” The Hostos Student Senate, the PSC, CUNY student organizations, the Modern Language Association and others have criticized Malo’s arrest as an attack on freedom of speech. McGuire told Clarion that he could not comment on the shortcomings in his representation of Malo. A few days later, the attorney released a statement that said, in part, “It is my hope that last week’s mistrial will draw attention to the lack of legal resources available to CUNY students.” He urged civil rights groups “to commit the best legal resources” to fight “the civil rights catastrophe” facing CUNY students.

Malo’s supporters noted that McGuire had worked on the case with limited means, lacking paid administrative support or the funds for overnight transcripts.

The judge was faulted by CUNY faculty who attended the proceedings, particularly for his refusal to allow testimony on First Amendment issues. “From the beginning, this was a biased trial,” said Bill Crain, a professor of psychology at City College. Campus police testified that they had announced a ban on outdoor protests at Hostos. But Judge Torres did not allow testimony from Lizette Colon, lecturer in counseling at Hostos, that there was no public notice and that permission was never needed in the past to leaflet or hold signs in the atrium where Malo was arrested. Torres also ruled out testimony from Luzinda Hughey Wiley, Hostos PSC chapter chair in 2001, on how sympathizers or ‘collaborators,’” Valloje told Clarion. “The Colombian government is complicit in the systematic violation of human rights of professors – both directly, through the actions of its agents, and by omission, because it has the means to halt this death march but refuses to do so.”

The Colombian government is the largest recipient of US military aid in the Western Hemisphere, having received over $2 billion since 2000. Trade unionists in the United States have begun to organize solidarity events with their counterparts in Colombia. One example is the growing campaign to boycott Coca-Cola in Colombia. The union, SINATRAI, charges that local Coke management has called in death squads to kill and terrorize its active members. (More details at www.killercoke.org.)

cooperation in coalition with other City unions – TWU, CWA 1148, CSEA Local 1000 and locals of DC 37 – the PSC chapter chair in 2001, on how

Coke bottling plants in Colombia. The union, SINATRAI, charges that local Coke management has called in death squads to kill and terrorize its active members. (More details at www.killercoke.org.)

Materials were later dropped. Rivera was not allowed to testify about the circumstances of his arrest.

Assault charges

The judge dismissed one charge against Malo, for resisting arrest, but left the assault charges standing. Student witnesses at the trial testified that it was, in fact, campus security who had assaulted Malo during the arrest, and photos of injuries to Malo’s back were introduced as supporting evidence. The prosecution dismissed these injuries as possibly self-inflicted.

A former vice president of the Hostos Student Senate, Malo faces a maximum of one year in prison if convicted. Prosecutors had previously offered to reduce the charges to a brief term of community service if Malo pled guilty, but he insisted that he is innocent and refused the offer.
Adjunct pensions: a surprising return

By ELLEN BALLEISEN
PSC Pension Counselor

As a PSC pension counselor, I have an embarrassing confession: I didn’t join the Teachers’ Retirement System (TRS) in 1986, my first year as a CUNY adjunct. In fact, I didn’t join for 13 years even though I knew adjuncts could participate in TRS. Back then I didn’t understand I would get back much more than I would contribute.

When I submitted my application in 1999, I still didn’t comprehend the numbers. But shortly after signing up, I read the fine print and had a startling realization: when adjuncts don’t take the initiative to join TRS, they are allowing CUNY to pocket large sums of money that otherwise would have been contributed to their pensions.

With missionary zeal, I started telling colleagues they should participate and explained that their contribution would be 3% of gross pay. People always responded, “So what percentage does CUNY put in?”

This simple question has a complicated answer. With a TRS pension, CUNY doesn’t contribute a certain percentage into an account in an employee’s name. Instead it makes annual lump-sum contributions based on actuarial calculations about all CUNY employees in TRS. Individuals never see CUNY’s contributions.

Two types of pensions

It’s helpful to understand that there are two different types of pensions: defined benefit plans and defined-contribution plans. A TRS pension is a defined-benefit plan, often called “a traditional pension.” Today defined-contribution plans have become more common; these include 401k plans, 403b plans and CUNY’s 403a plans such as TIAA-CREF.

In CUNY’s defined-contribution plans, both the employer and employee contribute a certain percentage of the employee’s salary into a retirement account, which is invested in funds that include stocks, bonds, and other investment vehicles. Pension payments come from this account. There’s no way to predict how much the pension will amount to because investment values constantly change.

In contrast, a defined-benefit pension like TRS does not depend on investment values. Instead retirement allowances are calculated using formulas based on years of service and highest annual earnings. Pension payments are funded by both employer and employee contributions, but at CUNY employees always put in much less than the employer.

Dramatic

My situation is a dramatic example. After joining TRS, I contributed 3% of my pay for two years. Then I made retroactive contributions with interest for the years I had not participated. In 2001, a state law began requiring CUNY to take over employee TRS contributions once the employee has either contributed for 10 years or been credited with 10 years of service. This enabled me to stop contributing.

My total contributions to TRS amounted to $12,400. Right now I have 16 years of credited service, and if I leave CUNY tomorrow, TRS will pay me about $10,000 per year from my 62nd birthday until the end of my life. By my 72nd birthday, I’ll have collected about $100,000.

If I reach 20 years of credited service, TRS will pay me at least $19,000 per year from my 62nd birthday until the end of my life. If I live to 82, I’ll collect at least $380,000.

In any possible scenario, my $12,400 contribution will provide me a much, much larger pot of money later on. And if I die before retiring, TRS will pay my beneficiaries a substantial death benefit.

Educators’ income tax guide

To: Membership Dept. Professional Staff Congress 25 West 43rd Street, Fifth Floor New York, N.Y. 10036

Enclosed is a check in the amount of $_______ made out to PSC for _____ copy(ies) of The Educators’ Income Tax Guide @$5.00 per copy.

Name ____________________________
Address ____________________________
City __________________ State ______ Zip ______

Tax time is here again

Uncle Sam is calling. You can get tips on how to respond with The Educators’ Income Tax Guide. You can order it from the PSC at a special price of $5.00, a substantial discount from the bookstore price of $16.75. Simply send in this form with a check.

Making up for lost time

Adjunct pension buybacks

Singing the TRS buyback blues? You’ve got lots of company. Many adjuncts enroll in TRS after they have already put many years into the CUNY system; they then want to get pension credit for their earlier work. This can be done by buying back the prior service—in other words, contributing the money that otherwise would have been contributed to your pension if you had joined when you started working.

Buybacks can increase a pension’s value many times over. But they can also require a large outlay of cash. For someone who has many years of service to purchase, a buyback can cost several thousand dollars.
Congress is drafting academics for the “war on terror.” On October 21 the House of Representatives passed HR 3077, also known as the International Studies in Higher Education Act of 2003. Now awaiting action in the Senate, the Act would reauthorize five years of funding (so-called “Title VI monies”) for international area studies centers — but the funds come with strings attached.

The bill would require international studies programs in US universities to undergo political monitoring by a committee appointed by Congress. It would also require, among other things, that Title VI centers around the country provide government recruiters with full access to their students, and that the Secretary of Education initiate a study to scrutinize “foreign language heritage communities” in the US in the interest of national security.

Must knowledge serve power?

By MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI
Brooklyn College

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PATRIOTISM WATCH

In fact, new language in the Act states that the purpose of this law is “to assist the national effort to educate and train citizens to participate in the efforts of homeland security.” It’s an ominous bill, demanding, in short, that knowledge must serve power.

Since the September 11 attacks, conservatives have been busy aiming their sights on the academy, and HR 3077 is the latest shot fired. The first salvo came when the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, a group whose founders include Lynn Cheney and Joseph Lieberman, issued a report detailing the thought crimes of professors around the country who, according to the group, were insufficiently patriotic. Next came Daniel Pipes’s Campus Watch, a nefarious Web site encouraging students to inform on professors who are critical of Israel. (Its “enemies list” approach adds as much to intellectual engagements with the Middle East as China’s Cultural Revolution did to culture.)

Currently, David Horowitz of the online magazine FrontPage is behind the push for the Senate to legislate an “Academic Bill of Rights,” which would require campuses to adopt political quota systems. Horowitz, basing much of his system on research into professors’ party affiliations on voter registration rolls, which illustrates an extremely simplistic view of both politics and pedagogy. Complexity, though, was never the right wing’s strong suit. Like President Bush, they seem to believe that you’re either with them or you’re with the bad guys.

INDEPENDENCE

None of this should surprise us, since the university is one of the few relatively independent spaces left in a culture that is saturated with simplistic media and infatuated with authority, but it is no less alarming. Because it is now on its way to becoming law, however, HR 3077 is particularly worrisome for the way in which the right wing has mobilized the political machinery of the state to push its own conservative agenda. If passed into law, HR 3077 jeopardizes not only the autonomy of the university but also the safety of our students, the rights of immigrant communities, and our freedom as academics.

What, specifically, are the targets of those promoting HR 3077? Scholars in Latin American studies, African studies and many other fields have expressed deep concern about how the Act would affect their work. And, indeed, the entire academy has reason to worry.

But, predictably, how to study the Middle East sits squarely in the middle of the debate. During subcommittee hearings last June, Hoover Institution Fellow Stanley Kurtz testified that “Title VI-funded programs in Middle Eastern Studies (and other area studies) tend to purvey extreme and one-sided criticisms of American foreign policy.” Kurtz’s testimony is thin on evidence, using only one teach-in and a few journalistic pieces to back up his assertion. But his testimony anyway seems less interesting in providing proof and more interested in character assassination and the contemporary equivalent of red-baiting.

“The ruling intellectual paradigm in academic area studies (especially Middle Eastern Studies) is called ‘post-colonial theory,’” testified Kurtz. His assumption is highly disputable (if not laughable), but most politicians spend little time reading academic tomes and can be swayed easily. Kurtz identifies his culprit responsible for “post-colonial theory,” namely, Edward Said, the nemesis of the pro-Israel right. In fact, the right wing seems altogether set on a goal of turning the late Edward Said into Karl Marx, and post-colonialism (a term, incidentally, that Said hated and rarely used to describe his own work) into a new kind of communism. Are you now or have you ever been a post-colonialist?

PRIOR PURGES

That question, though ludicrous, is about to have very serious consequences that seem disturbingly reminiscent of earlier ideological purges. The 1958 National Defense Education Act that first established Title VI funding required, under Title X, a loyalty oath and affidavit, and we are now in the process of returning to the fear-mongering and bullying of the McCarthy era. Under HR 3077, the government will create an “International Higher Education Advisory Board,” comprised of seven members. Two of the seven will be drawn directly from national security agencies, and the other five will be political appointees. The Board will be “authorized to study, monitor, apprise, and evaluate a sample of activities supported under this title,” and will then issue recommendations to Congress about how closely Title VI monies reflect their politically-determined notions of national security.

No one can reasonably object to bureaucratic oversight — but this monitoring is driven by politics, not fiscal management or academic peer review. If area studies centers don’t sufficiently support American foreign policy, their funding could be jeopardized. Ideological policing can have only devastating effects on our independence as scholars and teachers.

HR 3077 takes us precisely in the opposite direction of where we should be heading. The United States needs to hear more from expert professors on the Middle East, not less. But rather than enhancing the free search, since the intent of research could now be secret and they may all be considered potential spies. The Act’s nationalist-security focus on “foreign language heritage communities” could draft area studies programs into a surveillance role in immigrant communities. The Act’s creation of an Advisory Board to monitor scholars’ political thinking menaces speech that is critical of official government policy.

SILENCING

The pressure to silence opposing views is a trend not only in the government but also among the conservative right, particularly when it comes to criticisms of Israel made in the academic community. Kurtz, Pipes, Horowitz, and Martin Kramer, editor of Middle East Quarterly, are all outsiders to the university: none of them holds a regular university appointment. Yet each has attempted, in his own way, to silence scholarly or campus views that are sympathetic to the Palestinians. What else, after all, is Campus Watch? Now, they have recruited lawmakers, more outsiders to the university system, onto their side, and the attack is widening.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration’s approach to international studies is similar to its methods in other affairs. If you don’t like what the experts report (the CIA on weapons of mass destruction, for example), get some experts of your own. (Rumsfeld set up his own intelligence agency, the Office of Special Plans, within the Pentagon after he became dissatisfied with the CIA’s conclusions.) Wish-fulfillment won’t produce results, however. You can order analysts to tell you what you want to hear, but that does not mean that the farts will follow suit. Ultimately, it is criticism, and not fantasy or silence, that is the key to both a better understanding of the world and a more informed foreign policy. Only by returning in this Act will help achieve these goals.

HR 3077 passed the House on a voice vote with no recorded opposition; the Senate has not yet acted on the measure. You can convey your opinion to Sen. Clinton at 202-228-6282 (fax) or 202-224-4451 (phone), and to Sen. Schumer at 202-228-3077 (fax) or 202-224-6542 (phone).

HEALTH CARE

What’s wrong with the Medicare drug bill

By FRANCINE BREWER
Retirees Chapter

The Medicare legislation passed recently by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush on December 8, 2003, is called the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act. I submit that the title of the act should be changed to the Medicare Privatization Act or the Medicare Subsidy Program for Insurance and Pharmaceutical Companies Act. Present and future retirees have very good reasons to be concerned about whether Medicare will survive the stealth attack perpetrated against the program.

The stated purpose of the law is to provide a prescription drug benefit for the one third of senior citizens who don’t have any coverage for prescription drugs. The bill does provide a modest but complicated and confusing new drug benefit for some seniors, while undermining and defunding the Medicare program that serves as medical insurance for doctors’ services and hospital fees for 40 million beneficiaries.

How does the law propose to help uncovered seniors get prescription drugs? Taxpayers (the public) will subsidize private insurance companies (812 billion) so they can be induced to offer this benefit. Pharmaceutical companies are encouraged to maintain their exorbitant prices for drugs that make constant price increases for consumers inevitable and drug company profits unconscionable.

SERIOUS THREAT

The bill does many things to undermine Medicare. Here are a few examples to illustrate the threat (and promise of serious harm) to Medicare:

If a Medicare beneficiary wants to get drug coverage, he or she must join an HMO to receive it. People who choose to do so will no longer be part of the Medicare program.

The government (US taxpayers) will subsidize HMOs to make it profitable for them to offer the drug benefit.

Medicare (with 40 million consumers) will not be allowed to use its buying power to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies and obtain the lowest possible prices for drugs. Such use will, in fact, be legally prohibited. Private insurance companies, however, will be allowed to use this leverage to get better prices from drug companies.

Although Americans (through the federal government) heavily subsidize the research that produces new drugs, we pay the highest prices for those drugs anywhere in the world. The bill forbids reimportation of drugs from Canada (or other countries) where drug prices are regulated by the government.

Private insurers will not guarantee that fair premiums will be paid by senior citizens. The cost of these premiums and the amount of co-payments will be increased for the sickest beneficiaries (flying them out of the drug program) and into Medicare while they “cherry-pick” the healthiest seniors and provide coverage for them. Medicare will be left with the sickest people to cover.

The risk pool will be altered in favor of private insurers and against Medicare.

The bill provides 86 billion in funding for a new tax-free Health Savings Accounts. This tax subsidy will undermine the risk pool for Medicare if healthier and wealthier retirees can use these tax shelters instead of being part of a national program that insures everybody.

Six “demonstration projects” will be set up in 2010. In these experiments, Medicare will compete with private plans (subsidized by the government). If Medicare costs more than private health plans, premiums for those in Medicare would rise.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, approximately 3.7 million retirees who now have drug coverage provided by their former employers will lose that coverage. Will that number grow? Very possibly.

All retirees should be alarmed by the new Medicare law. It offers a modest prescription drug benefit for senior citizens who do not have such coverage while at the same time undermining the Medicare health insurance program for all seniors included in the Medicare program.

In the years to come, the viability of Medicare will be threatened and the scope of its coverage will almost certainly be greatly reduced. If the current law is not repealed or drastically revised and a sensible prescription drug benefit incorporated into Medicare, the health coverage currently and future retirees rely on will disappear. The drug benefit will (and already has) paved the way for Medicare, the health coverage current and future retirees rely on will be compromised because the unrestrained marketing of drugs and the uncontrolled profits of the pharmaceutical industry will lead to reduced benefits.

What can you do? Become active in the Retirees Chapter of the union. Add your voice to the efforts of the Alliance for Retired Americans and other organizations that are working to preserve Medicare and offer a good prescription drug benefit for people without coverage.

Francine Brewer is a member of the PSC Retirees Chapter. A health counselor and wellness educator, she represents the PSC on the steering committee of Rebalancing Reform, an organization working for universal health care in the US.

Health coverage for many could disappear.

POETRY

Living by the Train Yards

By PAGE DOUGHERTY DELANO

In our bedroom on the street the unwieldy heater glowed and spat unpredictable flames, giving little heat to the dumpty room. The rats were river rats, living in the building’s empty open basement. One night a rat climbed through the bathroom holes only to be attacked by our dog. Another night my husband slammed a rat with a hammer, good aim from the bed. When he went on nightshift I worried some, each rat-like wintey noise, until I learned the night, alone in the room turned wild by train wails. The baby slept under thick blankets in the sea of her huge room on the river-side. I kept my hands ironed between my thighs, it was that cold. The little heaters barely warmed the place, its floor sloped, tall windows flanked by plastic shades. Upstairs the man with the pale mealy kids stormed against his red-haired wife. What little heat we had rose to them, while the man shoved and bruised the woman. I don’t know how I let our baby sleep so far off with rats wailing. She seemed safe in her crib.

We installed the Warm Morning Stove in our baby’s room on the coldest day, shutting off the gas for hours until we tested the line with dish soap, finding no gassy bubbles rising from connections. The baby slept through that cold in her hand-me-downs under blanket layers. The stove glazed and cooed and I no longer feared for the baby being cold. On those few nights Ted was home, slowly we warmed because love-making keeps its own heat—oakleaf quilt, blanket dropped to the lonely floor. Waking cold in the morning I didn’t care. The kitchen floor froze, a glass crust of diamonds on the paper-thin linoleum rug past a good decade back, and frost cloaked the windows so the river was gone, the bastard trees gone. Revolutions, they say, come in winter when soldiers are most fed up and hungry but on such mornings it is hard to wake to anything outside. We had our stories of heat. In the spring the man upstairs left his wife. She brought her kids outside to whine and play. Soon the river was banished again behind leafy trees, another kind of government.

From No One with a Past is Safe (Word Press, 2002). Page Dougherty Delano, a former community organizer in Appalachia, will be assistant professor of English at BMCC starting this Fall.
A PSC profile: Alexandra Tarasko

A hands-on approach to medicine

By TOMIO GERON

The best way to help people, says Alexandra Tarasko, is to work with them to find solutions to their problems. She is a professor of nursing at Queensborough Community College and PSC grievance counselor at QCC, Tarasko says that the best medicine is prevention – both in health care and with workplace problems.

Tarasko recently led the formation of a new program in massage therapy at QCC, the only one in the New York metropolitan area that is college-based. Massage therapy is used to treat muscles injured by sports, work or accidents, as well as to relieve stress or pain from arthritis. Massage is even used to help patients with illnesses as severe as cancer or heart problems – not to cure the underlying condition, but as a complementary therapy to assist patients in their recovery.

**MANY USES**

“It’s really been useful for all kinds of illnesses,” Tarasko says. “What massage does is help to increase circulation, support the immune system and relax a person to the point where the body can begin to heal itself.”

The AAS degree program includes training in both Eastern (such as shiatsu) and Western (such as Swedish) forms of massage therapy.

Tarasko first experienced the benefits of massage therapy while she was recovering from pneumonia and kidney stones. “I could just barely drag myself back to class,” she says. “It helped me tremendously in getting my energy back. I just started reading more about massage therapy and found how beneficial it was for so many illnesses, and [in] prevention and stress reduction.”

Massage therapy can help, Tarasko says, not only when a person has a disease or serious injury, but also to prevent a problem. “Getting a massage once or twice a month really helps to maintain a person’s health.”

A registered nurse, Tarasko worked with three departments at QCC to develop the program, and also drew on outside experts at Trocaire College in Buffalo and SUNY’s Columbia-Greene Community College. The program was eventually approved by the CUNY Board of Trustees and began accepting students last year.

Over 100 students are now enrolled, and Tarasko says that more than half of them already have bachelor’s degrees. “[These students] are dissatisfied with their jobs,” she says, and so they have returned to school. “They want a job where they can get something back,” she says, and have decided that a career in health care would be more rewarding.

Other QCC faculty were initially skeptical of the legitimacy of an academic program in massage therapy. But after Tarasko detailed what the program would involve, including the heavy science load required and its licensure by New York State, they came around. Support for the program increased – and stress levels across campus went down – when some classes visited department offices to practice chair massages. “Everyone really loves that, and students get a chance to practice their material,” Tarasko says.

This spring, the QCC program will open a clinic that will treat students, faculty and community members for a nominal fee. “It’s really been useful for all kinds of illnesses, and [in] prevention and stress reduction,” Tarasko says. “We spend a lot of time together and really got to understand what each other’s problems were,” she said.

GRIEVANCE HEALING

Tarasko is also a union grievance counselor for QCC, a job that she sees as so different from therapy. “Being a grievance officer is also a healing position to me,” she explains. “Although it may be strange to view it that way, I don’t see it as being so separate from holistic health in terms of philosophy and skills.”

Prevention – or “wellness,” as she describes it, is the key thing they have in common. “Because a lot of grievance prevention is like illness prevention,” says Tarasko. “A lot of the focus is to deal with illnesses before they become a conflict.”

And in grievance work as in health care, stress reduction is an important topic.

While Tarasko tries to get problems settled before a grievance must be filed, she concedes this is not always possible – even at a school like QCC, where she says college management is unusual in its cooperative approach to labor relations. “We don’t always interpret the contract the same way,” she says, and those disagreements are handled by the formal grievance process. Tarasko is also a member of the union-wide PSC Grievance Policy Committee, which decides whether to take unresolved cases to arbitration.

Shortly after she became a grievance counselor, Tarasko attended the Summer Institute for Union Women in 2002 in Maryland with three others from CUNY – a HEO, a CLT and an adjunct faculty member. “We spent a lot of time together and really got to understand what each other’s problems were,” she said.

AUSTRIA

Tarasko’s belief in the importance of unions comes from first-hand experience. She was born in a refugee camp in Austria after World War II – “I know what poverty is like,” she says – then immigrated to the United States.

“When I came to this country and started school, I didn’t speak a word of English,” Tarasko recalls. She later attended Queens College, before switching to Hunter to major in nursing.

While in college, she worked at a sweatshop in Ridgewood to pay bills. “I worked in horrendous conditions in the summer with no air conditioning, working in a knitting mill surrounded by sweaters,” she explains. “That was quite an eye-opener. I tried to join a union and almost got fired. I know how much employees are at the mercy of employers.”

PSYCHIATRIC NURSING

Tarasko later worked at Roosevelt Hospital, focusing on psychiatric nursing. She got her master’s degree at NYU before joining the faculty at QCC.

At Queensborough for 18 years, Tarasko currently is working on getting other holistic health options into the nursing curriculum. “There are really so many kinds of alternative health care therapies that I see could become a certificate [program],” she says.

She teaches courses in psychiatric nursing and in alternative therapies. Her students appreciate the deep breathing exercises she teaches them to decrease stress, which are especially useful before finals. After all, exams can be stressful – even when the topic is holistic healing.

Alexandra Tarasko, a professor of nursing at Queensborough, helped to launch a new massage therapy program.