Iakovos Vasiliou, associate professor of philosophy at Brooklyn College, spoke against CUNY management’s proposed new student complaint procedure at a Board of Trustees hearing on January 22. Many critics called it “a solution in search of a problem,” but warned that its lack of clear standards or guarantees of due process will invite attacks on academic freedom. A proposed computer use policy was also criticized for its lack of privacy protections.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM AT ISSUE

POLICY PROPOSALS DRAW FACULTY FIRE

RETIREMENT

Job changes, tax changes & pensions

Former adjuncts hired on a conversion or substitute line should call a PSC pension counselor right away. And new tax law changes are important for domestic partners and others.

CONTRACT

Bargaining begins in February

The PSC and CUNY scheduled their first negotiating session, and the DA will hold a special meeting to finalize demands.

DILLARD BENEFIT

Poetry reading raises funds for New Orleans

CUNY poets read from their work at an event organized by the PSC Peace & Justice Committee in November. Proceeds benefited Dillard University in New Orleans.
College Student Relief Act

House Democrats have approved a bill to cut interest rates in half for federally subsidized loans to undergraduate college students.

Students and higher education professionals lobbied House members, who voted 353-67 in favor of the Student Relief Act on January 17, sending the measure to the Senate. The AFT and NEA both applauded the move. AFT President Edward McNally said in a statement that the AFT is “ready to tackle other equally important measures, particularly our goal of increasing the maximum Pell Grant to $5,100” from its current $4,500.

RateMyProfessors.com is bought by MTV

On January 17 MTV’s college-student-oriented 24-hour channel, mtVU, bought the website RateMyProfessors.com. The website allows students to rate professors “good, average or poor quality” and “hot or not.” Professors rated highly on the last point receive an increasing number of chili peppers.

MTV also purchased College Publisher, a network of some 500 online college periodicals. Every two purchases allow MTV to “everywhere our audience is, we can sell MTV President Christina Norman.

Cops beat prof

Atlanta police arrested Tufts his- torian Felipe Fernandez-Armesto for jaywalking after he crossed the street between hotels during the January. The arresting officer threw him to the ground, hand- cuffed him and hauled him to a crowded, filthy jail cell after Fern-andez-Armesto refused to identify the officer’s identification. Bruised and in pain, he was held for eight hours and could have been fined $1,000 for bail. All charges were later dropped.

Fernandez-Armesto, a British citizen, is the author of 19 books and is a former Oxford don. The mild-mannered academic says he has no plans to sue; AHA is considering a complaint.

Iraqi academics at risk

Iraqi institutions of higher educa- tion and Iraqi academics them- selves are a little-publicized casualty of the war. Some 250 professors have been killed and hundreds more disappeared since the war began, reports the Brussels Tribunal and the Spanish Campaign Against the Occupation and for the Sovereignty of Iraq.

The two organizations have set up a petition to the United Nations and other human rights organizations to “break the silence”, it can be found at www.brusselstribunal.org. clarion@clarion.com, 61 broadway, 9th floor, new york, ny 10006. e-mail: photoress@pscmail.org. fax: 212-302-785.

CSl day care workers rally

Day care workers at the College of Staten Island picketed the college’s Children’s Center in December, as part of their con- tract campaign. The center’s 28 workers belong to Local 338 of the Retail, Wholesale & Department Store Union. The union says the center, which provides subsidized day care to CSI students, is underfunding its welfare fund.

Free speech in the university

As readers can see, Clarion’s quote from this CUNY Alliance state- ment was accurate. But the state- ment itself was not – Kingsborough in fact never had any rule banning discussion of union politics on col- lege listserves. Fabricant doesn’t offer any quotes from these “regulations,” because they don’t exist.

As we reported last issue, after NC supporter Patrick Lloyd stated his views on the union election on a Kingsborough listserv, the CA complained to college administra- tion – which then banned Lloyd from the listserv. But this was an arbitrary action that was not based on college policy. After the elec- tion, CUNY admitted that the sup- posed policy at KCC did not in fact exist, and the union won a settle- ment in which CUNY administration reversed its decision to ban Lloyd, and promised to respect all PSC members’ right to engage in politi- cal speech in this online forum.

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Now most adjuncts insured by the Welfare Fund are covered by anoth- er Empire Blue cross plan that requires referrals for visits to specialists, a $25 copay for doctor’s visits, a $75 copay for emergency room visits, up to $30 for medication after meeting a $100 deductible, no reimbur- sement for costs of net- work providers, and reductions in payments to practitioners like chiro- practors so that most good ones refuse to join the plan.

Ingrid Hughes

PSC President Barbara Bowen responds:

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New credit union name

As of November 2006, the credit union names changed from PSC/CUNY Federal Credit Union to Education Affiliates Federal Credit Union. The name PSC/CUNY FCU served us well for over 25 years, but as the credit union continues to grow, it welcomes members from outside the PSC/CUNY system. So after much consideration and discus- sion, we felt a name more reflec- tive of our current membership base was warranted.

While our name has changed and we have moved into a new office space, our commitment to excel at member service, and to provide you and your family access to competi- tive personal financial products and services has not wavered.

Laurie Stern

President, Education Affiliates FCU
By PETER HOGNESS

The PSC bargaining team and CUNY management have met to begin negotiations for a new contract on February 7. The two sides will start by discussing ground rules for future bargaining sessions, with specific issues taken up at later meetings.

The PSC Delegate Assembly (DA) discussed possible union demands at its November, December and January meetings. In early February the union’s Executive Council will recommend a set of demands to the DA, and delegates will vote on the proposed package at a special meeting on February 15.

In a message to union members, PSC President Barbara Bowen reported that the union would press CUNY to settle the new contract before the current one expires in September 2007. “I am confident that we will present a focused, strategic and ambitious bargaining agenda to address the needs of CUNY faculty and staff,” Bowen said.

DELIBERATION

Local chapter discussions on contract demands have helped shape the negotiations. Delegations, and some chapters conducted e-mail surveys as well. Member comments from last fall’s “listening campaign” have been another source of input. The Delegate Assembly has sometimes divided into small groups to allow for more thorough discussion.

Topics have included salary increases, Welfare Fund benefits, workload, adjunct equity and job security, paid parental leave, HEO and CLT advancement, other needs of particular titles, and more.

Both at the DA and in chapter-level discussions, union leaders have asked members to think about which demands should be a priority for the union as a whole. At one meeting Marianne Pitta, PSC chapter chair at Bronx Community College, argued that “we should prioritize demands that will unify us, around which all members can rally.”

BMCC Associate Professor Charlie Post at the December 21 Delegate Assembly.

CUNY agrees to union request

At its meeting in January, the Executive Council named the members of the union bargaining committee for this round of negotiations. The new committee is made up of the PSC’s four principal officers (President Barbara Bowen; First VP Steve London; Secretary Arthurine DeSola; Treasurer Mike Fabricant), four vice presidents (VP for Senior Colleges Bob Cermicle; VP for Community Colleges Anne Friedman; VP for Campus Unity Iris DelLuto; VP for Part-Time Personnel Marcia Newfield), and Executive Council members, NYSUT, the PSC state affiliate, Francine Brewer’s Grievance Policy Committee, for its many small human touches.” Presi- dent Barbara Bowen’s March 2006 column, “Straight talk about the contract” was praised as an “excellent point-by-point rebuttal of the university administration.”

NOT PERFECT

“The Bush Hurricane,” an article about the social fallout of Hurricane Katrina by Neil Smith, distinguished professor of anthropology and geography at the Graduate Center, was “a serious and insightful article,” judges said. They complimented both the text and the text of the two-page spread, citing “the dynamism of the pictures” by Gary Schoichet. Another Clarion photo, a shot of retiree Jim Perlstein taken by photographer Dave Sanders, won Metro’s award for best photo.

The presence of the Clarion website, www.psc-cuny.org, which is administered mostly by retiree Bill Friedheim, won several awards, including NYSUT’s first prize for photo, Metro’s second place award, a third place award from ILCA, and another from AFT. The site has the look and feel of a very vibrant and active local,” said one AFT judge.

FISCAL FORECAST

The PSC had written to CUNY management on November 3 to request that the two sides start contract talks. Later that month Vice Chancellor Brenda Malone agreed in principle to begin bargaining, but said that talks should not start until “after the holiday season.” CUNY must consult with both New York City and State about its contract negotiations, and Malone wrote that while it is possible for the state to reach settlements with some unions, “the State is not as far advanced in its negotiations and will...be engaged in a transition to a new administration in January.”

On January 9, the City’s Independent Budget Office (IBO) said that NYC’s fiscal situation was improving. The IBO predicted that the City would end up with a $2 billion surplus this year, and a $100 million surplus the year to come. In his State of the City address, delivered January 17 at City Tech, Mayor Bloomberg proposed spending $1 billion of that surplus on a series of tax cuts. He did not pledge any new money for union contracts — which drew criticism from the Patrolmen’s Benevolent Association.

Its president, Pat Lynch, noted that low starting salaries have hurt police recruitment.

By DANIA RAJENDRA

For the second year in a row, Clarion was named best union newspaper of the year by the International Labor Communications Association (ILCA), the labor media organization for unions in the US and Canada. The award was given in November for work in 2005. The paper also won recognition from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), NY State United Teachers (NYSUT), and the NY Metro Labor Communications Council.

Besides the award for general excellence, ILCA judges cited Clarion for its distinctive art and news writing. Gregory Nemec’s drawing “Aca- demic freedom under attack,” on the cover of the Summer 2005 issue, won first prize for art. The newspaper was among all local unions in North America, judges called it “very striking.”

In the competition for best collective bargaining, Clarion’s work on the union’s new newspaper, Clarion wins local, national awards

For reporting, art and design

The ILCA also praised designer Marzena Aigner and First VP and President Steve London’s combined work on a feature with charts that showed management’s declining contributions to the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund. “They know what an informa- tion graphic is,” judges said. They also cited Hog- ness’s article on the first two CUNY students killed in Iraq as “well written and moving.”

Within the AFT, Clarion took home second place among the largest locals for best feature story and best column, and third place for general excellence and best editori- al. Judges called it “a smart, activist publication” and one that reflects “an engaged membership as well as honest, committed leadership.”

FEATURE

The feature story award went to Rajendra’s interview with Charles Moleworth, former chair of the Queens College English department and currently chair of the PSC’s Grievance Policy Committee, for its many small human touches.” Presi-"
Governor Spitzer objects

A board member of Brooklyn’s Seventh Grade School, Sutton heads the Seventh Grade Community Federation. A former parent, he has a long history of support for community-based social service and charity work. His political contributions have gone to both Democrats and Republicans, across a political spectrum ranging from Sen. Chuck Schumer to former Sen. Rick Santorum. He is a supporter of American Friends of Likud.

Wiesenfeld, a principal in Bernstein Global Wealth Management, worked as Pataki’s community liaison in the New York metro area in the late 1990s. An alumnus of Queens College, he worked for four years in FBI counter-intelligence. He began his career in NYC politics as a staffer for Queens Democrats and then moved to the right, working successively for Mayor Ed Koch, Sen. Al D’Amato and then Gov. Pataki. When Wiesenfeld was first appointed in 1999, Isaac Abraham, a longtime activist in Brooklyn’s Jewish community, charged that Wiesenfeld had referred to African-Americans as “savages” and labeled Hasidic Jews “thieves.” Wiesenfeld claimed that Abraham was motivated by a personal feud but never denied the charges.

As a CUNY trustee, Wiesenfeld continued to court controversy. After an anti-war teach-in at City College in October 2001, he told the New York Post that “I would consider that seditionary behavior.” Wiesenfeld told reporters that while CUNY could not fire faculty members who spoke at teach-ins, “They’re fortunate it’s not up to me.”

Pataki’s presidential ambitions a factor?

As his first term as trustee expired at the end of June, Pataki did not nominate him for a second. Conservative activists were worried and went public with their concerns. In two editorials in the Post, and both opinion and news articles in the New York Sun, Wiesenfeld’s ideological supporters rushed to his defense. “Any failure to reappoint Wiesenfeld would be a slap in the face to the lone trustees who have the courage to stand up to the tyranny of radicals on our campus,” SUNY trustee Candace de Russy told the Sun.

Press reports that Pataki was considering Fernando Mateo, head of the NY State Federation of Taxi Drivers, for the post were followed by warnings that Pataki would lose right-wing support for his presidential bid if he did not renominate Wiesenfeld. In September, Pataki finally sent Wiesenfeld’s name to the State Senate – too late for a hearing in the regular legislative session. As late as October, the Sun reported that it was “up in the air” whether Wiesenfeld would keep his job.

LATE-NIGHT DEALS

In the end, Wiesenfeld was confirmed in a lame-duck legislative session in mid-December. His was one of more than 70 Pataki nominations approved by the State Senate in a late-night meeting full of last-minute deals, as the arrival of the Spitzer administration loomed on the horizon. “This was like the last helicopter ride out of Vietnam,” an Albany insider told Clarion.
CUNY central administration has stubbornly resisted the idea of job security for adjuncts. Management insists that part-timers “may be re- fused reappointment for any reason or no reason at all” – even when someone has dedicated themselves to “UNY” students for 10 or 20 years.

Canadian universities have shown that there is a better way. “Overall in Canada, adjuncts tend to have some form of seniority, and it has changed the culture of working part-time,” said Marcia Newfield, PSC vice president for part-time personnel. Academic unions in Canada have used a variety of approaches to job security for contingent academic labor. “We would gain valuable insight by more closely examining their contracts and methods.”

“What we try to bargain for is some continuity within the position,” explained David Robinson, associate executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which represents both full- and part-time faculty. “The employer shouldn’t be able to hire one person one semester and another person the next semester, to limit salaries and benefits.”

Even the most basic kinds of job security provide a key difference to adjunct faculty. “I used to take more work than I should have, to the detriment of my health, to guard against not having enough work the next term,” said Richard Wellen, who worked for years as a part-timer at York University in Toronto.

“Contingent job security is also important for full-timers,” said Margot Young, national research officer for the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE). “We’re seeing an erosion of full-time tenured faculty [longevity] – and the lack of rights for part-timers helps fuels that trend, because it increases management’s confidence in a part-time labor market. When contingent academics can be fired at will, she said, “that puts everyone at risk. When contingents don’t have academic freedom and the right to speak out, that’s bad for universities as a whole.”

“We think there are a lot of advantages to the teaching shop in this environment,” said Fred Ho of CUPSE Local 3903, which represents contingent faculty at York. “If people know in advance that they’re likely to have the same course that they’ve taught before, it allows them to prepare better.”

“For the sake of the university,” he told Clarion. “It depends on the department. It’s critically important for everyone will be teaching with a PhD – but that would be less true, for example in fine art. Preferred qualifications might include publications in the area, or relevant field work. “They can be specific, but they have to be reasonable,” he said.

RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL

Joyce Lorimer, a full-time faculty member at Wilfred Laurier University in Ontario and former CAUT officer, explained how it works at her school. “They have to have taught this course, or one that’s substantially the same, at least three times in the preceding 24 months,” she told Clarion. At that point they are evaluated by a committee of full-time faculty, who consider the adjunct’s past teaching evaluations, course materials, cv. and other information supplied by the adjunct. “They have to decide if the person should be offered this course in the future,” Lorimer said.

While some are rejected at this point, Lorimer said, it is rare. “If someone is not good in the classroom, they should not be rehired three times,” she said.

The greater stability that results from this system benefits the department, Lorimer told Clarion. “We encourage them to become part of its academic life,” she said. “If the university asks them to do something truly serious like sit on a major committee, there’s some kind of compensation. We would always prefer to have colleagues that become part of the family of the department, rather than poor people constantly running from one campus to another.”

Many colleges have longer-term appointments that augment the more common semester-by-semester practice. At a number of campuses, after a certain number of semesters teaching the same course with positive evaluations, an adjunct’s position becomes a “rolling” appointment – routinely renewed unless the adjunct faculty member is otherwise notified. At Western Ontario and some other schools, nonrenewal of such long-serving adjuncts requires a statement of reasons.

“This is critically important for faculty freedom,” said CAUT’s Robinson. “The onus must be on the employer to show that there are justifiable reasons for nonreappointment.”

If management is not required to explain its actions, he said, an adjunct’s job can be at risk “just because they don’t like someone’s viewpoint or political opinions.”

REASONS REQUIRED

At a number of universities, seniority is weighed as one of several factors in hiring for part-time faculty positions. “There’s a set of required and preferred qualifications,” said Fred Ho, explaining the system at York. Required qualifications might include prior experience teaching the subject of the course, or the type of degree required.

“This might be a master’s degree, or a doctorate in a given field,” said Ho. “It depends on the department. In a science department, virtually everyone will be teaching with a PhD – but that would be less true, for example in fine art. Preferred qualifications might include publications in the area, or relevant field work. “They can be specific, but they have to be reasonable,” he said.

IN BRIEF

Houston janitors raise hell, win raise

Some 1,300 janitors walked off the job in October in Houston – a right to work city. The strike hit five major cleaning companies and, as part of the campaign, workers held huge rallies and creative actions, such as dragging garbage cans and trash bags into busy intersections.

Organized with SEIU, the workers said they were part of a new wave of union activity that has seen janitors and other allies and won a huge victory in November with a first contract that includes wages from $5.15 to $7.75 by 2009, and new benefits such as health insurance, paid holidays and accrued vacation days.

“We got justice,” bargaining team member Mercedes Herrera said to the LA Times. “Just put, ‘Invisible no more.’”

UFT supports Oaxacan teachers’ union

In December, United Federation of Teachers delegates voted overwhelmingly to support teachers in Oaxaca, Mexico, in their fight against government repression.

The resolution states that the UFT “calle[s] on the Mexican government to withdraw all federal forces and bring a non-violent end to the conflict [and] recon- ciliates the claims of the teachers of Oaxaca and their sup- porters.” The UFT resolution built on one adopted by AFT at its August convention, which was pro- posed by the PSC.
Who decides the shape of CUNY?

By DAINA RAJENDRA

A proposed new procedure “for handling student complaints about faculty conduct in academic settings” has provoked fierce opposition from faculty advocates. The University Faculty Senate voted to reject the plan at its November plenary, and the next month the PSC Delegate Assembly called on the trustees to withdraw it from consideration.

The draft procedure is intended to cover “student complaints about faculty conduct in the classroom or other formal academic settings” – but it never defines what constitutes inappropriate conduct. Existing CUNY policies are much more specific; for example, CUNY’s sexual harassment policy defines sexual harassment, lists prohibited conduct and provides examples.

CUNY already has policies in place to deal with grade appeals, academic integrity, sexual harassment, violent behavior, discrimination and other clearly defined problems. The disciplinary procedure defined in the union contract has been used to address past allegations of faculty misconduct. Many faculty therefore questioned why CUNY would propose a new procedure that lacks due process protections guaranteed in the contract.

NO POLICY

“One always needs to be cautious when presented with a ‘solution’ where no problem is evident,” said Aaron Barlow, assistant professor of English at City Tech, in his testimony at a January 22 hearing. CUNY Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs Frederick Schaffer told a January 18 article in the Clarion that “Clarion | February 2007

Several centralized initiatives from CUNY management sparked sharp debate during Fall semester and into the current term. A proposed student complaint procedure and a new computer use policy drew strong criticism from CUNY faculty and staff.

Faculty advocates are also scrutinizing proposed changes to CUNY’s multiple positions policy and a proposed policy on research misconduct, with a report on restructuring CUNY’s doctoral programs in the sciences soon to follow.

These moves come on the heels of several recent 80th Street initiatives that drew faculty ire:

• Launching the School of Professional Studies with no departmental structure to provide faculty control over curriculum
• Creation of a CUNY Teachers’ Academy, which Chancellor Matthew Goldstein announced to the surprise of faculty in CUNY’s existing schools of education
• The decision to build a centralized science research facility, adopted before most CUNY science faculty had even heard of the idea
• The PSC and the University Faculty Senate have both objected to the increasing number of initiatives conceived with little or no faculty input

The trend from 80th Street has been to extend management authority over both curriculum and discipline – attempting to circumvent regular departmental structure, faculty governance, and the PSC-CUNY contract.

Such moves toward more centralized, corporate-style management have been increasingly common in American universities. Joan Scott of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton has described the results: “The increasing turn to the corporate model...involves not only the legitimation of the ultimate authority of the governing board to make educational decisions outside its area of expertise (without consulting faculty who are experts on these matters) but also the devolution of the faculty as members of university communities.”

MANAGED MORE

Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhodes, authors of Academic Capitalism and the New Economy, argue that the move to “increase the power of administrators to manage academic work” is part of a broader shift toward a more market-driven university organized along business lines.

But, as Scott notes, this shift may be accompanied. “The attacks on governance and on faculty standing more generally...have not been accepted passively by university and college faculties,” she says. “There has been resistance at every point, in the form of faculty protests, unionization efforts, and public relations campaigns.”

Slaughter puts it this way: “The only way the corporatization of colleges and universities can be stopped is through committed organizing.”

DR. R.PH

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**DR. R.PH**
Faculty want change in computer policy

Inhibits research and teaching

By DANIA RAJENDRA

CUNY management’s proposed computer use policy is dangerously overbroad, faculty and staff testified at a January 22 hearing. Certain provisions could lead to invasion of users’ privacy, compromise confidential research, violate the PSC-CUNY contract and infringe on academic freedom, PSC members warned.

The union and the University Faculty Senate agreed that CUNY needs a clear policy on computer use, and they supported some parts of the administration’s draft. “The introductory statements affirming academic freedom, freedom of expression and freedom of inquiry are necessary and important,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London. “But these general assurances are undermined by other provisions and by the lack of specific policies that would adequately protect users’ privacy.”

EXCESSIVE

“In general, the policy is excessively invasive of privacy, for both students and employees,” said Lee Ten, senior staff attorney at the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF). “Employers tend toward broad policies that arrogate maximum discretion with minimum accountability,” Ten told Clarion. “Universities should strive to do better, given the nature of their community and need for academic freedom.” Founded in 1990, EFF has become well known for its defense of civil liberties in the use of electronic technology.

PSC representatives expressed particular concern about provisions that would allow management to monitor faculty and students in online classroom discussions without notice. “Article 18 of the contract clearly states that if you’re going to observe people teaching their classes, you have to give them 24 hours notice,” London said. Management has so far refused to negotiate with the union over this or other contract-related issues.

INADEQUATE

Union and UFS leaders criticized the policy’s inadequate protections for confidential research. The policy itself states that “users have no guarantee of privacy during any use of CUNY computer resources or in any data in them, whether or not a password or other entry identification or encryption is used” and gives CUNY “broad latitude to monitor activity on its computer systems. For faculty whose research is confidential, this is unacceptable, said Keith Markus, associate professor of psychology at John Jay and the Graduate Center. “The policy’s reliance on encryption to protect confidential research data is inadequate,” he said. “It seems clear that we cannot safely do our work on our college computers while connected to the network under either the existing policy or the new one.”

The policy states that administration monitoring is warranted if management determines that “there is a reasonable basis to believe that CUNY policy or federal, state or local law has been or is being violated.” But many CUNY computer users conduct research on people who break the law – and to do so, they must promise confidentiality to their research subjects.

“The policy creates an absolute, non-negotiable conflict with the confidentiality commitments to subjects that an ethical researcher must make,” said Margaret Smith of the Institute for Criminal Justice Ethics at John Jay. “This is obviously much more acute with subjects whose activity is unlawful or immoral.” Smith has been the data analyst for an ongoing John Jay study of child abuse by Catholic priests.

The proposed policy allows CUNY to fill access to websites based on content, as long as content is not the ‘sole’ reason to limit access,” he said. “Content-based restrictions of any sort are quite dangerous, especially in the context of higher education.”

Where the proposed policy grants CUNY the right to access users’ information to diagnose technical problems, it fails to provide basic protections that are the norm among internet service providers (ISPs), Greenbaum said. “When ISPs have a clause like this in their company policies, they routinely require that users be given prior notification,” Greenbaum said. “CUNY should do the same.”

INVASIVE OF PRIVACY’ SAYS ELECTRONIC FRONTIER FOUNDATION.

The administration at NYU sparked a controversy – dubbed “Blackboard-gate” – in November 2005, when, at the start of the recent strike by graduate assistants, administrators were authorized to monitor online discussion in graduate assistants’ classes. The move drew sharp condemnation from many tenured faculty and NYU stopped the monitoring soon after it came to light.

LOOPHOLE

Nathaniel Charny, PSC director of legal affairs, pointed to a loophole in the proposal that could threaten academic freedom. “The proposed policy allows CUNY to filter access to websites based on content,” he said. “Content-based restrictions of

At the January 22 hearing on CUNY policy changes, those waiting to testify were crammed behind a barrier at one end of the room. They faced administration representatives across a wide gulf.
Pension choices and new lines

By ELLEN BALALIEN

If you’ve just started working in a new full-time position at CUNY, you should immediately discuss your pension options with a pension counselor. It’s important to do this within your first 30 days.

Your pension plan will depend on your hiring line:

- If you are hired for a new full-time position, or
- If you have been hired as a substitute, or
- If you have been hired for one of the new full-time service eligibility positions.

You must choose within 30 days.

Those hired for conversion lines who may have already joined TRS as adjuncts will keep that membership, and your account balances will carry over if you remain in TRS. If you have significant pension credits under TRS, this is probably your best choice— but speak to a pension counselor to be sure.

If you’re an adjunct who joined TRS after they were already members, you might want to consider joining a substitute line. They can roll over in after your first 30 days. You should speak to a pension counselor to be sure.

DOMESTIC PARTNERS

One change is particularly important for domestic partners: if you inherit retirement money from someone who isn’t your spouse, you will no longer face discriminatory treatment. Spouses who inherit retirement money have long been able to roll over the inheritance into an IRA, avoiding tax on the rollover and paying taxes only on withdrawals. In the past, non-spouse beneficiaries had to pay income taxes on the full amount of inherited retirement money at the time of the inheritance.

The new law changes this, and provides all non-spouse beneficiaries of retirement plans with the same tax treatment as spouses.

TAX RULES

Finally, the tax rules have changed for moving retirement funds into a Roth IRA. Roth IRAs allow workers to contribute post-tax earnings into an account that will provide tax-free money in retirement. Previously you could not move funds from a pension plan into a Roth IRA in retirement. Previously you could not move funds from a pension plan into a Roth IRA in retirement. Unlike TRS, the ORP does not grant credit for prior service. If you have a full-time position do not join the ORP, you will be required to stay in the ORP, and will never be able to get pension credit for their full-time service position. But if they do not join a pension system while they are substitutes, they may join TRS if they work for CUNY again— either as an adjunct, or on a regular full-time faculty line. Once they have joined TRS, they will be eligible to buy back TRS credits for both their prior adjunct service and their service on the full-time substitute line.

All faculty hired on substitute lines are strongly encouraged to speak to a pension counselor at the PSC within their first 30 days.

EDUCATORS’ INCOME TAX GUIDE 2007

Mail to: Membership Dept., Professional Staff Congress, 61 Broadway, 15th floor, NY, NY 10006

Enclosed is a check in the amount of $______, made out to PSC for __ copies) of The Educators’ Income Tax Guide $6.00 per copy.

Name ______

Address ______

City ______

State ______

Zip ______

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CUNY
NOTICE OF NOMINATIONS AND ELECTIONS – SPRING 2007

Chapter Officers, Delegates and Alternates to the PSC Delegate Assembly and PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council

Term of Office: 3 Years

OFFICERS TO BE ELECTED

In each of the Chapters listed below, voters will elect the Chapter Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, four Officers-of-the-Assembly (AOA) and three Delegates to the Delegate Assembly (the fifteen percent (15%) membership). The AOA and the delegates may concurrently serve as officers of the Chapter. The AOA shall be the initial designee of the Delegate Assembly and the delegates the designees of the Delegate Assembly.

Eligibility of Officers: Officers of the Assembly are elected by the members of the Chapter and are not members of the Chapter. Officers must have been members in good standing for at least one year prior to the election for those offices. Officers must be members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council.

Eligibility of Delegates: Delegates may be members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council or any other PSC-CUNY-related body. Delegates must have served as members of the Chapter Assembly for at least one year prior to the election and must have been members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council for at least one year prior to the election.

All voting must be on the official PSC ballot. Write-in ballots are prohibited. Ballots must be mailed to members’ home addresses on April 2, 2007.

NOMINATIONS:

Listed below are the members elected to the Chapter Office, the designee to the Delegate Assembly and the delegates to the Delegate Assembly.

Chapter

President

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Brooklyn College

Susan Johnson

Brian D. Roberts

Terrie Mitchell

Brooklyn College

Deborah D. Whitney

Dr. Jane A.K. Richter

Edith R. Schneier

City College

Joyce Benitez

Dr. Carolyn Lechuga

Yolanda J. Draszy

Queens College

Dr. Aaron Byock

Dr. William G. Calabro

Dr. Elizabeth B. Catano

Dr. Joan F. L. Denby

Hunter College

Dr. Caroluse King

Dr. Vivian P. Levy

Dr. Jane L. Oates

LIFE College

Dr. Rosemary O’Callaghan

Dr. Stephen E. O’Connell

Dr. Joseph M. Rezleski

Medgar Evers

Dr. Fredric J. Brandow

Dr. Walter C. Butts

Dr. Robert J. Pace

Parsons College

Dr. Mary Beth Flanagan

Dr. William C. Jones

Dr. Michael A. J. Matthews

Parsons School of Design

Dr. Elizabeth E. Berry

Dr. John G. Caruso

Dr. Cheryl G. E. Cassady

Registrar

Research Foundation

Brenton S. White

Dr. Robert L. Kozel

Dr. Richard J. Kozel

2. A slate of candidates will be recognized if it consists of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the positions on the ballot. In chapter elections, any nominated slate of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the positions on the ballot may have an option added to the slate. The option must be in writing, approved by the organization of the appropriate chapter and must be submitted to the PSC office by 5:00 pm on March 5, 2007. The slate must be submitted to the PSC office in writing by 5:00 pm, March 5, 2007. The slate must consist of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the positions on the ballot.

3. Petition signatures must be submitted to the PSC office by 5:00 pm, March 5, 2007. Petition signatures must be submitted in writing, signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) or twenty (20) members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, or any other PSC-CUNY-related body, and must consist of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the positions on the ballot. The petition must be in writing, signed by no fewer than twenty-five (25) or twenty (20) members of the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund Advisory Council, or any other PSC-CUNY-related body, and must consist of candidates for twenty-five percent (25%) or more of the positions on the ballot.

4. The order of labels on the ballot will be determined by the Randomized naamnumerical method of the appropriate chapter for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2007.

5. Eligibility for Holding Office: Members must have served as officers of the appropriate chapter and must have been members in good standing of the appropriate chapter for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2007.

6. Nominating Procedures: Nominations of an individual or a slate of candidates by the members of the organization shall be by the following procedures: (a) the individual member must be a member of the organization; (b) the individual member must have served as an officer, or by no fewer than twenty-five percent (25%) of the members of the organization for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2007. The organization of the appropriate chapter must submit the names and addresses of the members of the organization for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2007.

7. Voting Eligibility: Members must have served as officers of the appropriate chapter and must have been members in good standing of the appropriate chapter for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2007. The organization of the appropriate chapter must submit the names and addresses of the members of the organization for at least one (1) year prior to the close of nominations, March 5, 2007.
Labor & Immigration

Justice Deported

By David Bacon

When Democrats won control of Congress last fall, they did it with strong backing from immigrants and labor. Two-thirds of union householdholds and of immigrant-heavy groups such as Asian Americans and Latinos gave their votes to Democratic candidates. But as Congress returns to the debate on immigration policy that went unresolved last year, it is an open question whose interests congressional Democrats will support.

The Bush administration thinks it can intimidate Democrats into supporting its immigration plan, opposed by immigrant rights groups and the AFL-CIO. And it is using a brutal tool to step up the pressure: a crackdown in the workplace.

When federal agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested over 1,000 workers in six Swift and Company meatpacking plants on December 12, the raids were staged for maximum media impact. In Greeley, Colorado, agents dressed in SWAT uniforms carried a hundred handcuffs into the plant. When they finished, they said, it were identity thieves. Barbara Gonzalez, an ICE spokesperson, told reporters outside the slaughterhouse there that “we have been investigating a large identity theft scheme that has victimized many US citizens and lawful residents.” ICE head Julie Myers told other reporters in Washington, DC that “those who steal identities of US citizens will not escape enforcement.”

Not everyone fell into the ICE chorus. In Grinnell, Iowa, Barak Obama's[S] 2008 campaign headquarters, a unionized Swift plant, Police Chief Steve Lanken refused to help agents drag workers from the slaughterhouse. “When this is all over, we're still here,” he told the local paper, “and if I have a significant part of my population that's fearful and won't call us, then that's not good for our community.” In Greeley, hundreds of workers, accompanied by the local priest, lined the street as their family members were brought out, shouting that they'd been guteprants, as they should be.

ICE rhetoric would have you believe these deportees were planning to apply for credit cards and go on a spending spree, racking up charges for expensive stereos and widescreen TVs. In reality, when these meatpacking laborers gave their employer a false Social Security number, they weren’t trying to steal from anyone. They had only one goal: to get hired for one of the dirtiest, hardest, most dangerous jobs in America.

Rhetoric vs. Reality

Many of their numbers were invented, others borrowed—from often other immigrants—who’ve managed to get green cards. ICE admitted that a number of those arrested had purchased their numbers from homeless people—hardly the best target for a get-rich-quick scheme. In fact, the real owners of any of those Social Security numbers will benefit, not suffer—because Swift paid thousands of extra dollars into Social Security on their behalf.

The undocumented immigrants who used these numbers will never be able to collect a dime in retirement pay for all their years of work on the killing floor. If anyone was cheated here, they were. But ICE agents are calling the victims thieves, in order to make their immigration raid sound like an action on behalf of upright citizens.

ICE press releases did not, of course, accuse the immigrant laborers of the real crime for which they were arrested: the crime of working. Since passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, hiring an undocumented worker has been a violation of federal law. Don’t expect Swift executives to go to jail, however, or even to pay a fine. The real targets of this law are workers themselves, who become violators of the minute they take a job.

Anti-Union

Arresting people for holding a job, however, would sound a little inconsistent with the traditional values of hard work that the Bush administration says it supports.

The real motivation for these immigration raids is more cynical. The crackdown in the workplace was aimed not only at immigrants—it was also aimed at the labor movement. It’s no accident that in five of the six Swift meatpacking plants where the December raids took place, workers belong to unions.

At the Cintas laundry chain, over 400 workers were terminated in November alone, as a result of no-match letters. Cintas is the target of a major national organizing drive by UNITE HERE, the hotel and garment workers union. Also in November, hundreds walked out of the huge Smithfield pork processing plant in Tar heel, North Carolina, after the company fired 60 workers for Social Security discrepancies. That non-union plant is not only a national organizing target for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union—Smithfield has specifically been found guilty of repeatedly firing its employees for union activity and threatening to use their immigration status against them. When workers at the Woodfin Suites hotel in Emeryville, California, tried to enforce the city’s new living wage law, they too were suddenly hit with a no-match check.

The ICE raids were calculated to generate publicity that would influence the debate over immigration reform. Bush wants Congress to approve his plan for “guest workers.” Corporations would be allowed to recruit hundreds of thousands of workers per year outside of the US, who would then be brought into the country on temporary visas that would require them to remain constantly employed. A worker fired after complaining about conditions on the job, or after joining a union, would lose his or her visa and have to leave. It’s an employer’s dream, a contract-labor scheme that resembles the infamous bracero program of the 1940s and ’50s.

At Swift, the administration is sending a message to Democrats: support our program, or we’ll paint you as the friend of identity thieves. There’s a message for employers and for unions as well: support the guest-worker program, or face a new wave of raids. “The significance is that we’re serious about work site enforcement,” threatened ICE chief Myers. In a Washington press conference the day of the raid, Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff told reporters that such enforcement efforts highlight the need for “stronger border security, effective interior enforcement and a temporary-worker program.” The raids and the guest-worker plan have one big thing in common: both are used to undermine unions.

ICE’s pressure campaign recalls the history of immigration enforcement during previous periods when anti-immigration bills were debated in the US Congress. Before 1986, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (ICE’s predecessor) conducted months of high-profile workplace raids, dubbed “Operation Jobs.” INS used the raids to produce public support for the employer sanctions provision that was later written into the 1986 immigration law.

In theory, employer sanctions make it illegal for an employer to hire an undocumented person. In practice, the law made it a crime for an undocumented worker to hold a job. This has given employers a big weapon to hold over the heads of their own workers, especially when they begin to organize. It was the law’s anti-union track record that led the AFL-CIO to change its position on immigration reform. In 1986, the labor federation had supported employer sanctions—and workplace raids. But as unions grew more assertive and labor and immigration activists, they repeatedly saw sanctions used to smash their campaigns. The 1986 law never kept undocumented immigrants from coming to the United States—but it did discourage them from asserting their rights on the job after they were here.

A 2006 Supreme Court decision made clear where this logic leads: the court decreed that although undocumented immigrants, like all other workers, have the right to organize, employers who fire them for union activity have no obligation to reinstate them on the job, or even to pay them back wages. Employer sanctions effectively remove any penalty for companies that violate the law and fire undocumented workers who try to organize.

With each passing year, it’s become clearer that if undocumented workers lose their jobs on the job, this creates a strong incentive for exploitation. As a result, since 1999 the AFL-CIO has called for the repeal of employer sanctions, along with the legalization of the 12 million people living in the United States without documents. When the meatpacking raids happened last December, workers belonging to the United Food and Commercial Workers went into court, asking for an injunction to stop the deportations and guarantee workers their rights to habeas corpus and due process.

ICE’s campaign of mass arrests is designed to force the new Democratic congressional majority to attack its own base. The administration wants Democrats to endorse guest worker programs and increased workplace raids in order to appear “tough on illegal immigration.” In preparation for the 2008 presidential elections. In doing so, they will have to turn against two of the major groups who produced the votes that changed Congress in November—labor and Latinos.

Choices

In contrast with the Bush plan, what unions and immigrants both need is a bill that would mandate what they’ve advocated since 1999—repeal of employer sanctions, workplace protections, and a path to citizenship. An earlier version of this article appeared on the web at www.prospect.org.
Poetry at the union hall

People filled the PSC union hall for a night of live poetry on November 17, with union members from seven CUNY campuses reading from their work. “Poetry of Resistance” was the theme of the evening, a fundraiser to benefit Dillard University, a historic black college in New Orleans severely damaged during Hurricane Katrina. Organized by the PSC’s Peace & Justice Committee, the event raised more than $1,500. The evening’s poets included Sultan Catto, Tina Chang, Nicole Cooley, Page Dougherty Delano, Jackie DiSalvo, Nick Powers, Cieply Rodaway, Grace Schulman and Roger Sedarat. On this page is a sampling of their work.

PAGE DOUGHERTY DELANO

Ode to X

After TV I cannot shake the thought
Of bombs dropping on Iraq, my desire off target.
In bed I know I will fail again,
Incomplete, the body’s explosion unworthy.
Oh, what rubble we grind through, brushing
Wet from our lips, spittle of despair,
Conspiracy of dark. Now they are flashing
Stories so private, all stony. Hush.
Even the window shade flaps my country’s role.
Too much TNT in the crook of an elbow,
Tongues around the city needing to reproduce.
Nothing can remove this skin from grief.

In the spin of his hair I hear the bombs sing.
In the gyre of my hips I feel the graves being dug.

GRACE SCHULMAN

Prayer

FOR AGAH SHAHID ALI

Yom Kippur: wearing a bride’s dress bought in Jerusalem, I peer through swamp reeds, my thought in Jerusalem.
Velvet on grass. Odd, but I learned young to keep this day just as I can, if not as I ought, in Jerusalem.
Like sleep or love, prayer may surprise the woman who laughs by a stream, or the child distraught in Jerusalem.
My Arab dress has blue-green-yellow threads
the shades of mosaics hand-wrought in Jerusalem
that both peoples prize, like the blue-yellow Dome of the Rock, like strung beads-and-cloves, said to ward off the drought in Jerusalem.
Both savoir things that grow wild – coreopsis in April, the rose that buds late, like an afterthought, in Jerusalem.
While car bombs flared, an Arab poet translated Hebrew verses whose flame caught in Jerusalem.
And you, Shahid, sail Judah Halevi’s sea as I, on Ghalib’s, course like an Argonaut in Jerusalem.
Stone lions pace the sultan’s gate while almonds bloom
into images, Hebrew and Arabic, wrought in Jerusalem.

No words, no metaphors, for knives that gore flesh on streets where the people have fought in Jerusalem.
As this spider weaves a web in silence, may Hebrew and Arabic be woven taut in Jerusalem.

Here at the bay, I see my face in the shallows and plumb for the true self our Abraham sought in Jerusalem.
Open the gates to rainbow-colored words of outlanders, their sounds untaught in Jerusalem.
My name is Grace, Chana in Hebrew – and in Arabic.
May its meaning, “God’s love,” at last be taught in Jerusalem.

ROGER SEDERAT

Dear Regime,

After you’ve ground him into powder, you can burn this to a fine ash. His family feels it would be better off with nothing.

My Father returned from Iran with everything but his bones. He said customs claimed them as government property. We laid him on a Persian carpet in front of the television. He said his family felt you could see the holes made from swords in his elbow. His arm reminded me of kabob koobideigh. It was hard for him to look outside; his arm reminded me of kabob koobideigh.

We laid him on a Persian carpet in front of the television. He said customs claimed them as government property. We laid him on a Persian carpet in front of the television. He said his family felt you could see the holes made from swords in his elbow. His arm reminded me of kabob koobideigh.

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My Arab dress has blue-green-yellow threads
the shades of mosaics hand-wrought in Jerusalem
that both peoples prize, like the blue-yellow Dome of the Rock, like strung beads-and-cloves, said to ward off the drought in Jerusalem.

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May its meaning, “God’s love,” at last be taught in Jerusalem.


Page Dougherty Delano is assistant professor of English at BMCC. “Ode to X” is from her collection No One with a Past Is Safe (Verse Press, 2002). It originally appeared in the journal Diaspora Arts & Letters.

Grace Schulman is distinguished professor of English at Baruch College. “Prayer” is from her collection Days of Wonder (Houghton Mifflin, 2002).

Roger Sedarat is assistant professor of English at BMCC. “Dear Regime” originally appeared in the Fall 1999 issue of Plainsongs.

NANCY CADY

September Notebook

Like the magic porridge that takes over the town, pours through the village, fills then empties the streets –

It swallows everything in September and it happens twice

First, in New York the burning seeped under our apartment door, into the window seams. The sharp smell threaded through my daughter’s hair for days.

Four years later in New Orleans water surges over, under, wrenches houses off stone foundations. The floodwall cracks, an explosion of gunfire. Water surges around my parents’ house.

I read that story to my daughter because

once upon a time there were two Septembers in two cities: the one of the towers on fire and the one of floodwaters rising.

Someone else is reading me the story. I crawl up on her lap but she says:

Don’t shut your eyes just because you can’t watch TV: the jumping couples from windows of Tower One, the families, attics split open, in the Lower Nine, waiting for rescue.

Once upon a time it was the end of August and the daughter, on the phone with her parents, begged them to leave the city. Fast forward to the parents’ repeated answer: this is our home.

The woman telling her parents to go to the superdome.

The mother saying: you are sending us to a watery grave.

Today’s American History Lesson, the voice says: Once upon a time in 1927 white men blew up the industrial canal. With a loud crack, they breached the levees. They wanted to drive the black families out.

So when my daughter’s class gathers at the flagpole for a “patriotic song” in commemoration of “the event”– the sky is a pure blue bowl capable of holding nothing.

Here is the weather, the voice says, New York’s bright sky in both Septembers. Ever since, a clear early fall day is 9/11 weather.

When the peasants run and the porridge blankets the streets who will save them?

My mother says, This is our home.

Today’s History Lesson: It swallows and swallows and swallows

I’d like to sit with her, Our Lady of the Breach. Our Lady of the Burning City. Our Lady of Uncomforted. I’d like to hold her hands down and whisper the lesson. I’d like to force the floodwaters down her throat.
While many of the full-time faculty members are not on campus during January, the CUNY central administration quietly moved to adopt two new policies that could have serious negative effects on our research and teaching. We must speak up to prevent these changes. The policy section states that CUNY offers “no guarantee of privacy during any use of CUNY computer resources or in any data in them.” Without a guarantee of confidentiality, scholars whose work must conform to federal standards on privacy of personal health information or of human subjects may not be able to use CUNY computers.

**COMPUTER USE**

The “City University of New York Policy on Acceptable Use of Information Resources” is in some ways similar to policies on computer use at many universities. It covers basic questions such as use of licensed software, but goes on to grandiose powers of surveillance of all data on CUNY computers without notice to the user. The “Procedures for Handling Student Complaints about Faculty Conduct in Academic Settings” is more alarming: it mandates a set of procedures for handling student complaints about faculty conduct in the classroom, but never defines what constitutes inappropriate conduct, never claims that such complaints are a problem at CUNY, and asserts (incorrectly) that investigation of faculty conduct in the classroom will not interfere with academic freedom.

Both the PSC and the faculty senate believe that CUNY should have a computer policy and that parts of the new policy are helpful. Other parts, however, violate the contract, or the union’s demand to negotiate on those parts of the policy. In addition to granting management the right, in certain circumstances, to conduct secret surveillance of your computer files and on-line teaching resources, the policy denies the confidentiality of computer-based research; shifts liability for any legal violations involving computers onto the faculty and staff (whether or not they are responsible); and provides even fewer protections to professional staff than to faculty. All the liability falls on us, while all the power goes to management – which, incidentally, in curs no reciprocal responsibility for providing adequate computer facilities to the academic workforce. In a setting where many of us lack decent computers and 60 or 70 adjuncts often share one office and one computer, that is not a trivial issue.

While some changes were made in the policy in response to pressure from the union and faculty, that is too little too late – and one might even say, its politics – remain unchanged. Faculty who testified at the Board of Trustees questioned the implications for freedom of speech of the policy’s prohibition against using CUNY computers to engage in “partisan political activity.” The faculty who spoke, all of whom called for changes in the policy, were especially eloquent about its implications for research. The policy states that CUNY “offers no guarantee of privacy during any use of CUNY computer resources or in any data in them.” Without a guarantee of confidentiality, scholars whose work must conform to federal standards on privacy of personal health information or of human subjects may not be able to use CUNY computers.

**PRIVACY**

The chief concern is surveillance. Section 13 of the policy states that “CUNY may specifically monitor or inspect the activity and accounts of individual users of CUNY computer resources, including individual login sessions, e-mail and other communications, without notice” (emphasis added). Although the policy promises that “CUNY does not routinely monitor, inspect, or disclose” individual user computer use without the user’s consent, the guidelines it provides for when this norm may be broken are not reassuring.

They include circumstances when “an account appears to be engaged in unusual or unusually excessive activity.” What constitutes “unusually excessive activity”? The policy is silent. Faculty and staff receive no assurance that our computer use, data and e-mail accounts will not be subjected to secret surveillance by a college manager relying on overly vague guidelines while exercising considerable power.

Because the power of surveillance without notice extends to all computer activity, it could include on-line class sessions and on-line teaching resources. Under this policy, college managers conducting surveillance could lurk on your students’ on-line discussion boards and engage in continual observation of your on-line class. The PSC has negotiated strict rules for the observation of class sessions; this policy violates them. What strikes me is that given an opportunity to set policy about computer use, CUNY’s instinct is to go for the more repres- sive, less collegial option. On policy, CUNY’s knee jerks in the wrong direction. The Electronic Frontier Foundation’s comment on CUNY’s proposed computer policy (see page 7) is telling: granting such broad powers of surveillance without notice is what one might expect in a corporation; we expect something different from a university.

**PROBLEMATIC PATTERN**

The same pattern emerges in the student complaint procedure. This is a new procedure, outside the contract’s grievance and discipline protections, for handling student complaints “about faculty conduct in the classroom or other formal academic settings.” Specifically excluded from the procedure are such issues as grade appeals, sexual harassment and discrimination – all of which are already covered by existing, and much clearer, CUNY policies. Instead, the new procedure purports to cover the undefined area of “faculty conduct” – even though CUNY’s own legal counsel admits that he has seen only a handful of cases that might be covered by such a procedure in six years at CUNY.

The procedure, then, addresses an undefined problem, and covers an area already handled successfully on many campuses either by existing campus policies or the actions of ombudspersons. Even more troubling is its claim not to interfere with academic freedom; the proposal asserts that it will address areas of faculty conduct “that are not protected by academic free- dom,” but never says what they are. There is clearly a need for more assistance for our students, many of whom cope with every imaginable hardship. But we cannot license the encroachment on the right of professors to do their jobs without the promise that they will not be subject to the same standards of accountability as their students. There are many other groups to intensify their activity at CUNY. It threatens to undermine one of the most remarkable things about the University: that despite terrible underfunding, punishing workloads, and substandard working conditions, we have managed to carve out a genuine shared academic area.

This initiative, like the computer policy, strikes at the fragile university-ness of CUNY. Its authors clearly do not value that as we do.

Assuming that the policy initiatives are adopted largely unchanged, the PSC will continue to press CUNY management to re- solve the issues they raise, and we will use our whole grievance machinery to fight their misapplication. But we may never find out what the ultimate issue was not re- hired after a student complained about the feminist poem she taught in an introductory writing course, or the senior researcher whose research subjects withdrew because he could no longer guarantee them confidentiality. CUNY cannot afford such losses. With these two initiatives – and others on the near horizon – CUNY management has announced its vision of the university. It is not an exaggeration to say that Chancellor Goldstein’s CUNY, for all its slick publicity, is a place where academic freedom is precarious, secret surveillance is allowed, and intellectual life is undermined. If we want another CUNY, we will have to orga- nize to create it.
Maria Cornelio teaches translators

By DANIA RAJENDRA

According to the 2000 Census, 1.8 million New York City residents aren’t proficient in English. For them, good interpretation can be a life-or-death matter.

As head of the translation service at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, Maria Cornelio caught a lot of mistakes in English to Spanish translations. Some were not critical on one form, the English word “homemaker” turned in to the Spanish word for construction worker – a house builder. But other errors were more serious: instructions for an experimental medicine went from “take one teaspoon” in English to “take one tablespoon” in Spanish - a potentially dangerous overdose.

Now, Cornelio is putting her lifelong experience in translation and teaching to work at Hunter, running the college’s BA program in Spanish-English/English-Spanish Translation and Interpretation.

UNMET NEEDS

Untrained translators are common, Cornelio told Clarion. “A lot of native Spanish speakers think that because they speak the language they can translate or interpret,” she said. And non-Spanish speakers are often too quick to press a family member or co-worker into service. “As a result,” she said, “we have a lot of poor-quality translations and interpretations out there. I’ve always been convinced that the only way to fix that is to have rigorous academic programs.”

That’s what drew her to Hunter’s program, which is devoted to training professional translators and interpreters. New York City has a huge unmet need for both interpreters (who deal with spoken language, usually in real time) and translators (who deal with written documents).

“Since it’s a Spanish major, graduates have to be very well versed in Spanish – not only in the mechanics of the language but also in the literature and the culture,” said Cornelio. Moreover, Hunter requires that students complete a minor in English, so they are qualified to translate both into Spanish and into English. While many graduates go to work directly after graduation, others go on to graduate study in the nascent academic field of translation and interpretation. The major may also be combined with elective courses for the student who wishes to do graduate work in various other disciplines.

How is a class on translation or interpretation different from a general Spanish language class? “For this program, students must be proficient in both English and Spanish,” Cornelio explained. “The language skills already have to be there. We focus on the skills needed to transfer meaning from one language to another.” This means a lot of discussion of comparative grammar, questions of syntax and cultural issues – all with the aim of making sure that the translation reproduces not only the gist of the original, but as much as possible of the layers of meaning that go beyond the literal definition of a single word.

“Expressions that involve figurative language, like ‘it’s raining cats and dogs,’ often don’t translate directly,” she said. “Students also need to know the register of the original: is it simple, informal language, or a highly structured text? They need to know the style: is it very flowery, is it humorous, is it ironic? They really need to get into the text to be able to render it well.”

THEORY & PEDAGOGY

With an increasing awareness of the need for professionally trained translators and interpreters, academic work in this area has also grown. “There’s a lot of publication on the theory of translation – the issues involved in transferring meaning, regardless of the language – and on the pedagogy of translation as well,” said Cornelio. “There are also quality control and assessment issues – practical questions of how you know whether good translation is being done.”

Cornelio first began interpreting and translating the way many immigrant kids do – for her parents. She came to New York from the Dominican Republic when she was 11.

“I always wanted to learn English,” she told Clarion. Growing up in the South Bronx, Washington Heights and Riverdale, she helped her parents communicate in hospitals, stores and parent-teacher conferences. “And whenever my parents bought a TV, or a blender, I translated the manual,” she recalled. “Instructions didn’t come in two languages, the way they do now.” Soon, her parents’ friends were asking if she could translate for them, too.

But she also remembers running up against her limits: “One place I had difficulty was in the hospital. As a 12-year-old, you don’t have the medical vocabulary in either English or Spanish.”

Cornelio’s parents wanted to make sure she didn’t lose touch with her native language. “They were always correcting my Spanish, especially if something sounded awkward,” she said. “They were really my first translation teachers.”

After high school, Cornelio began working full-time with TransWorld Public Health and Hospital Services Ltd., putting her translation skills to work for the health consulting company. TransWorld had an undergraduate at Hunter, she majored in Spanish and minored in French. Cornelio graduated in 1996, and continued to work full-time for TransWorld, setting up health care facilities in rural areas of Latin America and French-speaking Africa. She often helped clinicians on an ad-hoc basis – for example, leading classes on nutrition – and she found that teaching was something she enjoyed.

After her work abroad, Cornelio entered a doctoral program in international studies at the University of Denver. She completed her coursework, but set her dissertation aside to start translation programs and work on other projects, including designing and teaching a course on use of the mass media for literacy and development at the New School. “That was my first experience teaching in a university setting, and I discovered that I loved it,” she said.

LOVES TEACHING

For the last 9 years, Cornelio directed the Hispanic Research and Recruitment Center (HRRC) at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, checking translations and providing interpretation to Spanish-speaking patients enrolled in clinical trials. At the same time, she designed and taught translation courses part-time in certificate programs at NYYU and the University of Chicago.

She came to Hunter as a substitute lecturer at the beginning of the fall semester, returning to her alma mater as a faculty member. “I was one of the typical Hunter students who work and study at the same time, so I know what our students have to go through,” she told Clarion. “I know the drive that they have to succeed.”

Cornelio is working on her own contributions to the field of translation, writing an introductory text on the subject, and surveying the quality of translation in the United States. Having worked as an adjunct faculty member, she appreciates the more consistent focus on her work that she says a full-time position makes possible: “I think my students benefit from that because I’m always focusing on my teaching, my research, and on this program that I want to expand and to grow.”

¿Puede traducir este titular?

By DANIA RAJENDRA

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Maria Cornelio in class in December.