PSC Executive Council members have spent much of the Fall on a “listening campaign,” visiting campuses to talk with chapter leadership and rank-and-file members, and meeting with union committees. These conversations will inform decisions by the union's Delegate Assembly on the PSC's strategic priorities for the next three years. In photo above, PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola (right) meets members at Baruch.
Key NY role in fight for Congress

By DAISY LYLES

Many people think of New York as a state that sends Democrats to Washington. But New York has nine Republican members of Congress—and it will play a pivotal role in the outcome of this year’s midterm elections. The Republicans currently control the House by a 15-seat margin.

With polls showing broad approval of both President Bush and Congress, many Republican-held districts are now competitive. This includes five to seven districts in New York State, three of which include many members of the PSC.

Steve Harrison is challenging incumbent Vito Fossella in the 13th Congressional District, which spans Staten Island and parts of Brooklyn. Harrison’s daughter attended the College of Staten Island, and he supports raising Pell grants to keep up with rising tuition costs.

That is a measure that Fossella voted against. Harrison has been vocal about increasing the federal minimum wage, while Fossella helped defeat a move to raise it from $5.15 to $6.15 an hour. In fact, in key votes in the current Congress, the American Federation of Teachers found that Fossella voted wrong on labor and education 100% of the time.

A Bush loyalist, Fossella has backed the war in Iraq without question, and states that American troops must stay indefinitely. But with the war unpopular in his district, Fossella is trying to avoid the topic. A search on his campaign website for the word “Iraq” gets the answer, “No documents matched your query.” Harrison supports a phased withdrawal of US forces. “There are no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Iraq was not responsible for 9/11—so there is no basis to continue,” he says. “We should get out of Iraq.”

SUBURBS

Democrat David L. Mejias is running against incumbent Republican Peter King in the 3rd District on Long Island. Mejias has built his campaign around such issues as environmentalism, protecting social security from privatization, and raising the minimum wage. He has criticized King’s vote to cut $12.7 billion from federal student loan programs.

With little to offer on these issues, King has talked mainly about terrorism. This August, King advocated racial profiling of airline passengers—a violation of civil rights that experts say is also ineffective. King made headlines when he announced that he thanks God every night that George Bush is president. “I say Peter King should wake up,” responded Mejias.

Democrat John Hall is opposing incumbent Republican Sue Kelly in the 19th District. The district includes Putnam County, and parts of Orange, Dutchess, Westchester and Rockland Counties. Hall has criticized Kelly’s support for Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” Act, arguing that insufficient funding has in fact left many children behind. Hall also says that with the Act’s intense focus on standardized testing, teachers sometimes neglect critical thinking and problem-solving skills in order “to teach to the test.”

Former head of the Saugerties school board, Hall, is also a musician and an environmental activist.

How the union endorses candidates

By PETER HOGNESS

The November 7 midterm elections may see a dramatic change in the Washington political landscape. Voters are increasingly unhappy with a Congress controlled by the hard right, and an unusual number of Republican incumbents may be turned out of office.

New York State United Teachers has traditionally endorsed many Republican incumbents—but at NYSUT’s endorsement meeting in August, PSC delegates supported the move to a “Take Back the House” strategy. “PSC delegates were part of strong sentiment within NYSUT to change the balance of power in Washington,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London.

This fall, the PSC is focusing on the opportunity for change in several New York Congressional races (see above). But in most elections, the union has focused its electoral energy on campaigns for local office. Local races may receive little coverage in the media, but in a close election a get-out-the-vote effort by mail and phone may determine the outcome,” said Eileen Moran, co-chair of the PSC Legislative Committee.

“Candidate screening is an extremely labor-intensive process,” said Moran. The busiest time in this process is in the summer, which does not mesh easily with CUNY’s calendar. “We prioritize races for open seats,” noted Moran, “since we have the most influence when candidates first seek election.”

In state and federal elections, the PSC does not act alone. Endorsements who have voted in favor of state and national races are made by vote of the NYSUT Board of Directors. “The PSC does its own intervi- viewers of federal or state candidates, mainly where there’s a unique opportunity to elect someone remarkable or no one terrible,” said Moran. This June, the DA voted on two recommendations from the Legislative Committee: that the PSC work for a NYSUT primary endorsement of Charles Barron for Congress and Bill Perkins for State Senate. Both have been strong allies of the PSC in their terms on the City Council; NYSUT backed Perkins but not Barron, who was defeated by incumbent Ed Townes.

NYSUT & PAC

Representing the PSC at this year’s NYSUT Endorsement Conference were Moran and Vera Weekes, co-chairs of the PSC Legislative Committee; PSC Secretary Arthurine DeSola; and London. Along with President Barbara Bowen, London and Moran are local coordinators for NYSUT’s Political Action Committee (PAC). At the conference, PAC coordinators and local presidents discuss recommended endorsements. The result is a set of PAC endorsement recommendations forwarded to the NYSUT Board of Directors for final determination.

HIGHER ED

In general, NYSUT’s endorsement policy has been to reward incumbents who have voted in favor of selected NYSUT positions. In races where there is no incumbent, its stated policy is to remain neutral “unless there is a compelling reason to make an endorsement.” If NYSUT makes no endorsement in a statewide race, a two-thirds vote of the Board of Directors may allow locals to make separate endorsements.

Over time, the PSC has worked successfully for higher education issues to get stronger consideration in NYSUT endorsement decisions. “Our advocacy led NYSUT to impose sanctions on those who failed public education in several budget overrides,” noted Moran. “NYSUT helps us affect policies on a statewide basis, and we have a growing voice within it.”
City & labor coalition to start talks

Union alliance a new factor

By PETER RIGNES & DANIA RAJENDRA

The municipal unions that came to-gether in June to form a bargaining coalition are presenting their de-mands to the City, President Bar-bara Bowen told PSC delegates on September 28. The Dele-gate Assembly (DA) ap-proved a resolution affirm-ing the PSC’s participation in the coalition, which in-cludes the UFT, sanitation workers and more than a dozen other unions.

“The PSC will still bargain direct-ly with CUNY,” Bowen told Clarion. “We will still present demands to CUNY on behalf of the PSC, after they are approved by the DA.” While the coalition does not change that, she said, taking part in the coalition will still be very important for the PSC. “We are in the coalition because we are part of the City workforce, and what the City bar-gains with other unions has a direct effect on us,” Bowen said.

For decades, New York City and State have insisted on keeping the economic cost of the PSC contract in line with their settlements with other unions, an approach known as “pattern bargaining.” CUNY needs approval from the City to sign a contract – and while State approval is also re-quired, the City’s stance has often had the biggest impact on CUNY management.

“We know that the positions of the City and State are very impor-tant for our final contract,” State London, the PSC’s first vice presi-dent, told delegates. “So we are tak-ing a strategic position with the City, to push that settlement as far as we can.” London noted that the labor coalition, which the PSC helped form, is the broadest such ef-fort seen in several decades.

“Our bargaining will be enhanced by the coalition because we will have greater strength with collec-tive muscle,” said PSC Treasurer Mike Fricandt.

ECONOMIC PACKAGE

The central item for coalition bar-gaining is the size of the overall eco-nomic settlement. As an active par-ticipant in the coalition, Bowen re ported, “The PSC has emphasized rank-and-file mobilization” to ex-pand the boundaries of a possible settlement. As a member of its nego-tiating committee, Bowen has also helped shape the coalition’s de-mands. The coalition was estab-lished on the basis of a six-month commitment, with member unions slated to assess the effort in January. While the coalition’s first bargain-ing session with the City is not sched-uled until late October, its formation is already having an effect. After the coalition was announced, the City dropped its demands for concessions in talks with the largest single munic-ipal union, DC37, which then reached a much better settlement than in its last round of bargaining. The New York Times and other observers con-cluded that DC37 had benefited from the coalition’s new muscle, even though it is not a member. “I think the formation of the coalition was the impetus for the mayor to settle with DC37,” Lynn Taylor, a member of DC37’s bargaining committee, told Clarion in August.

DIVIDED WE FALL

The last DC37 contract included only a 4.17% pay hike over three years, plus 2% in exchange for “pro-dactivity” changes – such as slashing the wages of new employees. Similar trade-offs were imposed on other City unions, as Mayor Bloomberg in-sisted they give up money (such as deep cuts in starting pay for police) or time (such as longer hours for UPT members) to get a pay increase.

The City’s strategy was based in part on its ability to deal with each union separately. This time, faced with a joint effort by more than half the municipal workforce, Bloomberg abandoned his insis-tence on concessions and moved to make a deal with DC37 as soon as possible. By signing a contract with modest increases (about 3%/annually over 32 months) at a time of a record City budget surplus, the mayor is seeking to limit how much other unions can gain.

The coalition is not negotiating over basic health insurance, which will continue to be bargained through the Municipal Labor Com-mittee. The MLC encompasses near-ly all municipal unions, including some large ones – such as DC37 and the PBA – that are not in the new wage-bargaining coalition.

Concern over Fiterman

By JOAN GREENBAUM

PSC Health & Safety Committee chairwoman and DANA RAJENDRA

At last, Fiterman Hall is to be taken down. CUNY is finalizing plans to decontaminate the building, then deconstruct the shrouded remains of BMCC’s former building, located directly north of the World Trade Center site. A new building replacing Fiterman is slated to open in 2009 – good news for overcrowded BMCC students. But the building, a fire and an eyesore. Some of the loudest complaints have come from real es-tate developers, who say that Fiterman’s damaged hulk is slow-ing rentals in the rebuilt office space around the World Trade Center site. “Fiterman Hall has been the bane of my existence,” developer Larry Silverstein told the Downtown Express.

So why is work on Fiterman only now about to start? The biggest cause of delay was a dispute with the insurance company, which claimed that the building could still be unsafe. A PSC and Bowen complained, said Dave Newman of the NY Committee on Occupational Safety & Health (NYCOSH). Resi-dents plan to keep a close eye on Fiterman as well.

DEVELOPERS UPSET

Fiterman has been increasingly criticized as both a safety hazard and an eyesore. Some of the loudest complaints have come from real es-tate developers, who say that Fiterman’s damaged hulk is slow-ing rentals in the rebuilt of- fice space around the World Trade Center site. “Fiterman Hall has been the bane of my existence,” developer Larry Silverstein told the Down-town Express.

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Together for 61 years – & now married

By DANA RAJENDRA

On June 26, 20 New York-based union leaders declared their support for marriage equality for lesbian and gay couples. PSC President Barbara Bowen joined UFT President Randi Weingarten and UNITE HERE President Bruce Raynor, among others, in speaking out.

"The union movement is at its most powerful when we fight to expand the civil and economic rights of all," Bowen said. Getting married bestows 1,138 federal protections and benefits, she noted, and "no one should be denied these rights on the basis of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or affectional preference."

Dennis Rivera, president of SEIU 1199, said, "While members of SEIU 1199 have a variety of views about marriage, it is a fundamental, uniting principle of our organization that all people are entitled to equal rights."

As part of its non-discrimination policy, CUNY recognizes same-sex marriages performed where they are legal, such as Massachusetts and Canada, but awareness of that policy has filtered unevenly through the University. "Gay and lesbian issues are, in fact, bread-and-butter issues," Gold told Clariion.

The Chen-Hayes family at the Labor Day parade: Lehman Associate Professor Stuart (left), Kalani and Lance.

**NEWS**

By any measure, PSC members Gus Archilla, 87, and Elmer Lokkink, 87, have lived extraordinary lives.

The two met in 1945 and have been partners ever since. Elmer attended City College, and the two worked there and at the Graduate Center until they retired together in 1976.

Their 30 years of retirement, which they call their "second career," have taken them to all seven continents (yes, even Antarctica) – and, three years ago, to Canada to get married. It was about time: the Daily News reports that with 61 years together, Gus and Elmer "may be the city's longest-standing gay couple." Since they tied the knot, they've forged a third career of sorts, and one in the fight for marriage equality.

**BEGINNINGS**

Elmer grew up in an orphanage in Illinois. In 1941, at 21, he was drafted into the Army. Shortly after the war ended in 1945, he was standing in a knot of people listening to a speech at Columbus Circle, when Gus spotted him. Gus, who had lost his own parents a few years earlier, was dashing out of Carnegie Hall after his voice lesson.

"It was almost sundown and I was running home to dinner," Gus remembers. "And we were not only embraced as family, and the siblings pulled to-gether to help each other as well, bu..." he pauses, "of course, the university was a big part of the world."

Keeping lists comes easily to a for-mer registrar. After graduating from City College, Elmer went to work at its School of Business; in 1953, he be-came CUNY's assistant registrar. The two moved from Washington Heights to an apartment in Morning-stone, and Gus says he walked to work every morn-ing and came home for lunch every afternoon. The apartment has been their home for the last 59 years.

Gus began working occasionally at the college, mostly in event planning. At first, it was one part-time job among many. But in 1968, when Elmer became registrar of the brand-new Graduate Center, Gus helped him set up his office systems. "At the Graduate Center, I discovered how much I enjoyed the atmosphere, the ambiance of academia," Gus says.

When GC President Patricia Rees asked him to join the staff as an assistant registrar, he went full-time and re-mained at the GC for more than a decade. They retired together in 1976.

"But he only had 13 years and I had 30," Elmer is quick to say. "So he doesn't get the pension I get!"

This kind of easygoing banter is one of the things they say they have kept together for so long. And Gus says that even after six decades of living together, working together, traveling together and loving one another, having a wedding did change things. "Somehow things ap-pear differently," he says. Being married is "a lot more serious than before."

"Well, he was gorgeous," Gus says. "When we first got togeth-er, Elmer says, "getting married nev-er crossed our minds."

"Not only that," adds Elmer, "but we knew that we couldn't. We couldn't even tell people that we were lovers."

"It was difficult to even think about it," says Gus. "The history of what has been done since is hopeful, sort of encouraging. Look at how many things we have won through the years – but how long did it take?"

"Hell be 91 in December, and I was 87 in May," says Elmer. All

New Yorkers will one day have equal rights in marriage, he says – "but we wonder if we'll still go to be here."

They are looking to the future. "Their wedding not only brought the two of them closer together, it brought them closer to the gay ac-tivist community – especially "the boys in Yonkers," as they call their new "best couple friends," Michael and Elmer Sabatino-Voorheis.

The Sabatino-Voorheises were married in the same spot as Gus and Elmer, the previous month. In Canada, as the PSC retirees waited for their marriage license to be pre pared, the clerk gave them a New York Times story to read about the wedding of a gay couple in Toronto. Later, after the Times featured Gus and Elmer, the two couples got in touch. "We've been friends ever since," Michael tells Clarion. Gus and Elmer credit these friends with supporting and encouraging their activism.

**ACTIVIST FRIENDS**

Michael and Robert Sabatino- Voorheis are active in Marriage Equality New York, a seven-year-old organization fighting for same-sex couples’ rights to marry. They encouraged Elmer and Gus to par-ticipate in their first-ever Gay Pride Parade. Since then, Gus and Elmer have been front and center at Marriage Equality NY’s annual demonstration for marriage equali-ty, dubbed the "Wedding March," across the Brooklyn Bridge. "They were our first Couple Of The Year," says Michael.

Gus and Elmer have also been ac-tive members of the PSC Retirees Chapter. They’ve joined the chapter at contract demonstrations, includ-ing picketing CUNY Board Chair Stuart Raynor, among others, in speaking out! On June 26, 20 New York-based union leaders declared their sup-port for marriage equality for lesbian and gay couples. PSC Pres-ident Barbara Bowen joined UFT President Randi Weingarten and UNITE HERE President Bruce Raynor, among others, in speaking out.

"Our Christmas list is 500," Gus adds proudly, "because we have accumulated an ex-tended family of friends through the years and we have them in every part of the world."

"Well, he never transferred," Gus says. "He liked City College so much I enjoyed the atmosphere, the ambiance of academia," Gus says. "When GC President Patricia Rees asked him to join the staff as an assistant registrar, he went full-time and re-mained at the GC for more than a decade. They retired together in 1976."

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Grad assistants end strike

Majority support reaffirmed

By BENNETT BAUMER

Members of the Graduate Student Organizing Committee (GSCG) at New York University ended their strike this fall without winning a union contract with the university. But while the strike will be a semester for "rebuilding," as they organize around issues such as higher health insurance costs and paycheck problems, GSCG had been the first union in the nation to win a contract for graduate employees at a private university. That agreement, in 2002, came only after GSCG took a strike vote. On the eve of the planned walkout, NYU agreed to major improvements in both pay and benefits.

RETAILIATION

But in 2004, a new Republican majority on the National Labor Relations Board reversed a previous NLRB decision, ruling that graduate assistants have no federally protectable freedom. As spring semester wore on, only a minority remained on strike, and NYU appeared no closer to the bargaining table.

To黑白asonic assistants who they have taken part in a labor action, the university has continued to employ them from employment in future semesters. Foreign grad assistants were especially vulnerable, as their student visas put strict limits on seeking work outside of NYU.

Normal university life was disrupted, and NYU offered hundreds of undergraduates the option of signing a petition and staying on their courses or retaking courses for free. The administration took an aggressive stance toward the strikers, threatening to ban them from employment in future semesters.

The NYU union has been a regular presence at GSOC picket lines, and as Dan Palm noted, "They would have to see what worked." But while the April actions boosted NYU's public profile, they were not enough to weather the student union assault by the NYU administration. GSCG members voted to suspend the strike over the summer, and in September brought it to an end.

Looking back, GSCG members sum up the walkout in different ways. "I think the strike was too long and we thought we had much more power than we did," said Fred Laiberti, a graduate student in mathematics. Laiberti was the last striking grad student in his department when he returned to work at the end of the fall 2005 semester. But he thinks grad assistants still need a union, and signed the petition in favor of GSOC.

Some grad assistants felt that the union should have relied on stronger direct action. "Before the winter break, many of us thought we'd've escalated," said Michelle Day, a graduate teaching assistant in the Creative Writing program. Though she was barred from teaching this Fall, Lewis told Clarion she does not regret the decision to strike. "I have come to the conclusion that NYU just wants cheap labor," she said.

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Other grad assistants said that grad students should have had more preparation for a strike action. "I learned about the strike the week it happened, and I don't know if we really have a union," said Holly Lewis, a striking teaching assistant in the Creative Writing program. Though she was barred from teaching this Fall, Lewis told Clarion she does not regret the decision to strike. "I have come to the conclusion that NYU just wants cheap labor," she said.

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"Anything CUNY management has accomplished is based on the efforts of grad members and other CUNY workers," said Shelly Mendlingor, PSC chair for College Lab Technicians. "It's typical of CUNY management to pocket the benefits of our hard work—while we constantly have to figure out new ways to 'do more with less.'"
What members are saying

Union leaders

This Fall PSC leadership has launched a “listening campaign” – and these pages feature some of what members have had to say.

By DANIA RAJENDRA

This Fall, the PSC is engaged in a process of strategic planning that will define the union’s main goals for the next three years. That process moved forward in September with a special meeting of the PSC Delegate Assembly.

The current “listening campaign” (see above) will inform the decisions of the Delegate Assembly (DA) and Executive Council (EC) as they weigh the union’s strategic choices, President Barbara Bowen told delegates on September 21. “We are developing a plan together,” Bowen said. “The idea is to make a conscious, collective choice about the direction we want to pursue.”

Delegates start to define the union’s choices.

In August the EC held a special two-day meeting to begin the process. At the September 21 Delegate Assembly, participants broke into small groups to address a common set of questions, including what the union’s achievements have been, what its main goals should be, and how to measure progress toward those goals.

Mark Richard, a labor lawyer and professor of sociology at Miami-Dade Community College, is working with PSC leadership on the planning process. Richard is president of the Miami-Dade CC local of the American Federation of Teachers, and is well known in the labor movement for his work in strategic planning.

The purpose, Richard said, is to define goals that will focus the union’s energy in the most effective way. “It’s a much greater challenge to do this process in large groups and with transparency,” Richard told the DA. “But your leadership told me I couldn’t come in unless you did it that way – and you should be proud of that. It just means that it takes longer.”

CONVERSATION CONTINUES

The conversation continues at the next DA, when delegates will examine the relationship of the current political climate to the union’s goals. Later in the year, the EC will propose a strategic plan to delegates, who will discuss it, consider amendments and vote on the final result.

BARGAINING COMES down to us versus them. We want the us on our side of the table to be as expansive as possible. When us includes our students, other unions, community groups, sympathetic politicians, religious supporters – that’s when we can win. We are on the same “side” as millions of other New Yorkers, and we will be strongest when our work is based on that connection.

– Penny Lewis
Instructor, Sociology, BMCC

IT’S IMPORTANT to connect our union with teachers and unions in other countries facing political, socio-economic and environmental dangers and to support public higher education against forces of privatization, corporatization and standardization.

– Electa Arena
Professor emerita, Modern Languages/Women’s Studies, CSI and Grad Center

THE UNION has got to get its overall e-communications process better organized. My biggest concern, even though I’m a faculty member, is HEOs. We would do much better in the next contract round and have a very powerful tool if HEOs worked only to rule, but they have to feel that the union’s there for them. That would make University management sit up and take notice.

– Bill Ferns
Associate professor, Computer Information Systems, Baruch

On campuses across CUNY, members of the PSC Executive Council are meeting with local chapter leaders and visiting departments and offices to talk informally with members. PSC Secretary Arthutine DeSola and other union officers are meeting with members in HEO-series titles on every campus, and another series of meetings is being held with union committees.

“It’s always a good thing for a union leadership to listen to members,” said President Barbara Bowen – and particularly now, when the union is planning its priorities for the next three years (see below). She said the discussions so far have been “always useful and sometimes revelatory.”

THE UNION

{Penny Lewis}

BARGAINING COMES down to us versus them. We want the us on our side of the table to be as expansive as possible. When us includes our students, other unions, community groups, sympathetic politicians, religious supporters – that’s when we can win. We are on the same “side” as millions of other New Yorkers, and we will be strongest when our work is based on that connection.

– Penny Lewis
Instructor, Sociology, BMCC

IT’S IMPORTANT to connect our union with teachers and unions in other countries facing political, socio-economic and environmental dangers and to support public higher education against forces of privatization, corporatization and standardization.

– Electa Arena
Professor emerita, Modern Languages/Women’s Studies, CSI and Grad Center

THE UNION has got to get its overall e-communications process better organized. My biggest concern, even though I’m a faculty member, is HEOs. We would do much better in the next contract round and have a very powerful tool if HEOs worked only to rule, but they have to feel that the union’s there for them. That would make University management sit up and take notice.

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– Alvin Tramble
Assistant to HEO, Bronx CC

WE'RE TRYING to build a stewards’ council here at LaGuardia. A stewards’ council is a system in which each department has a representative, and that representative also organizes his or her department or area. We want to focus on getting the campus organized. Any help from the central office would go a long way.

– Karen Miller
Assistant professor, Social Science, LaGuardia CC

WIN OR lose, it's worth a fight on the Taylor Law. It brings the debate on the constitutionality of the law into the forefront and would be a major way to coalesce the entire labor movement on this issue. It's an issue that anybody can relate to – public sector employees should have the same right to strike or take action on the job as private sector employees.

– Peter Ranis
Professor emeritus, Political Science, York College

FACULTY'S EFFORTS are spread too thinly over too many courses. Faculty should be assigned fewer courses so they can give their students and material the same attention that instructors in "elite" schools are able to offer. Our students deserve no less. We need to start organizing a bold contract campaign now, one that will reduce the number of courses over which faculty are spread, provide parity pay for part-timers, and reverse tuition increases at CUNY. Such a campaign would build on the increased professionalism achieved by the latest contract and inspire full-timers, part-timers and students to work together to continue the building of a new CUNY.

– David Arnow
Professor, Computer & Information Science, Brooklyn College

THE ONLY way to break through is to get the governor and other politicians on our side. We need to use our endorsements to get support from the political establishment – otherwise they're wasted.

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COLLEGE LAB TECHNICIANS are like second-class citizens. We’re left holding the bag in the summer or on vacation days. We’re working like dogs and there’s nowhere to go. We have no real promotional paths, so there’s no way to get credit for doing that much work. Couldn’t there be a new CLT title – equal, but different from, the Chief CLT line – to reflect the new technical responsibilities CLTs have?

– Jerry Sitbon
Senior College Lab Technician, Queensborough CC

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Q. What's happening with tenure?
A. The timeline for tenure at CUNY has recently changed. The PSC negotiated the terms of the change with CUNY as part of the most recent PSC/CUNY contract, and the new timeline has become part of New York State law. For faculty with tenure start appointment dates prior to Fall 2006, the “tenure clock” is five years. This means that most professors with an appointment date in September 2001 became tenured at the beginning of September 2006 (five years). In the future, the “tenure clock” will be seven years. A professor with an appointment date of September 2007 occurs after five years.) If, however, you were hired on a tenure-track professorial line and your appointment effective date is September 1, 2006, you have a choice of either the five- or the seven-year tenure clocks. Faculty who were initially appointed to a tenure-track position on or after October 1, 2005 but effective (for tenure purposes) September 1, 2006 – and faculty who were in non-tenure-track positions such as Instructor or Lecturer prior to September 1, 2006 and were initially appointed to a tenure-track line of 15 years, are entitled to choose between the five- or seven-year tenure clocks. The option exists just for this one-year cohort, whose appointment coincides with the change in timeline. Faculty in this cohort will have a year to make their decision, and the choice is irrevocable. Q. How does the change in the “tenure clock” affect me?
A. If your appointment to a tenure-track faculty position was effective before September 1, 2006, you will not be affected by the change in the tenure clock. Your time-to-tenure will remain five years. You will also experience no change in the tenure clock if you are a college laboratory technician or a teaching assistant at the Hunter Campus Schools. (Faculty hired on Lecturer lines are also unaffected by the change; appointment with a Certificate of Continuous Employment still would expect to become tenured in September 2014 (seven years).
Q. Why was the tenure clock changed?
A. CUNY management has been seeking to make this change for several years. But they tried to do it unilaterally – without negotiation with the PSC. Management’s view is that seven years is the standard tenure clock at research universities and that it is appropriate for the City University of New York. Some CUNY faculty, especially in the senior colleges, strongly supported the proposal for a longer tenure clock; others, especially in the community colleges, strongly opposed it. For several years management had been working to obtain the required State Legislature approval for the change.
Q. What is the union’s position on the change?
A. The union blocked CUNY’s attempt to change the tenure clock in Albany without negotiating with the PSC or providing any new benefits. The PSC argued that a longer tenure clock should be linked to the research environment that typically accompanies a seven-year, non-tenured period immediate re-assigned time for junior faculty and well-funded sabbaticals. As part of the negotiations for the 2002-2007 contract, the PSC achieved an increase in re-assigned time for junior faculty from 12 to 24 hours, and an increase in sabbatical pay from 50% to 80%. In return, the union agreed to support the legislation that would result in the change. The legislation was introduced in Albany but opposed by the City College, strongly opposed by the AFT (University staff), and strongly supported by the PSC and the community colleges. The measure was passed by the State Senate and Assembly and signed into law by Governor Pataki. The legislation has been in effect since September 1, 2006 – and it is an entitlement and part of New York State law. For faculty who were initially appointed to a tenure-track position on or after October 1, 2005 but effective after five years.) In making the decision, you should consider your own academic and personal plans.
Q. Do I need to decide right now?
A. No. You have until September 1, 2007 to notify your department chair in writing of your choice. It’s a big decision. Talk to colleagues who have recently reappointed their contracts and to your department chair. Also feel free to contact the PSC if you have questions or concerns.
Q. What about re-assigned time?
A. As part of the new contract, junior faculty appointed September 1, 2006 and after will receive 24 hours of full-paid reassigned time (and sabbatical pay from 50% to 80%) for five years. If, however, you were hired on a tenure-track position after September 2, 2002 (five years), you are entitled to choose between the five- or seven-year tenure clocks. The option exists just for this one-year cohort, whose appointment coincides with the change in timeline. Faculty in this cohort will have a year to make their decision, and the choice is irrevocable. If you hear that you need to do more than others in the past because you’re getting 24 hours of reassigned time or because of the longer tenure clock, let someone from the PSC know. Chancellor Goldstein is on record as opposing an increase in the requirements for tenure with the new tenure clock. There should be no increased expectations over past requirements.
Q. How do I get more information about tenure, re-assigned time or other issues?
A. You can contact your chapter chair (see the PSC website for a list: www.psc-cuny.org), or call the union hotline at 212-354-1252. There are always counselors on hand to answer questions. Adapted from a flyer produced by the PSC Junior Faculty Organizing Project in collaboration with the PSC negotiating team and rank-and-file members of Kingsborough Community College.
BENEFITS

Improvements in the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund dental benefit, made possible by the new contract, will be announced in a separate column. The changes are scheduled to take effect after the first of next year.

The trustees and Fund staff have been working hard to develop the best options, together with our consultants, the Segal Company, said the Welfare Fund’s Steve London.

Once final decisions are made, the Fund will send members a detailed description of the new dental benefit options by mail; information will also be posted on the union’s website (www.psc-cuny.org).

False alarm on City pensions

“The trustees and Fund staff are also in a strong legal position, Aaronson noted: “The constitution of the State of New York guarantees that no public employee pension benefit can ever be diminished or impaired.”

The benefits of future TRS members—employees not yet hired by CUNY or the City—do not have this same legal guarantee. If their benefits face a threat, it does not come from a hypothetical $49 billion figure. It comes from Mayor Bloomberg, who has announced that he will seek union concessions on pensions in order to cut the City’s contributions. If Bloomberg is seri- ous about pursuing this course, he will be following the footsteps of the MTA, which provoked a strike by transit workers last December with its hard line on this issue.

The language of The Times’ articles is worth examination. Its news reports called NYC’s public pensions “the envy of private-sector work- ers,” and labeled their cost-of-living adjustments “a benefit virtually unhe- ared of in the private sector.”

NO LUXURY

The Times did not describe what that cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) actually amounts to. It does not keep up with the rate of inflation but is instead limited to one-half of that, and applies only to the first $80,000 of pension income. This COLA is more of a “diet COLA.” In the current year, it adds up to a maximum of $23 a month. While it’s good to have this money, it is no one’s ticket to a life of luxury.

The Times’ sense of fiscal out- reach, however, is not limited to taxes on business owners and the wealthy were cut under Mayor Giulian- i for a loss of more than $1 bil- lion. But to the City’s hard-liners, there were no front-page expositions. If Mayor or Bloomberg decides to pick a fight with public employees, it is fairly clear which side the Times will be on.

PSC members march on Labor Day

If you are in TRS and if you nor- mally make contributions to your pension plan, the ASF account for Tiers I and II or the MCAF in Tier IV, deductions will be taken propor- tionately from your retroactive pay.

If you are in TRS, your “TRS” sound, “TRC has enough funds to pay retirees’ pensions for their entire lifetimes, and will also have enough to pay all those who have not yet retired.” CUNY foundations are also in a strong legal position, Aaronson not- ed: “The constitution of the State of New York guarantees that no pub- lic employee pension benefit can ever be diminished or impaired.”

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NY Times account falls short

The head of Missouri’s public re- tirement system told the Times that New York City’s actuarial method is “perhaps the most fiscally conserva- tive of all methods available.” And a municipal credit analyst with Standard & Poor’s noted that NYC’s approach helps build up assets more rapidly than alternative meth- ods. These statements, however, were reported a full week after the Times’ initial scare story.

It is certainly possible for a public pension system to be underfunded. And some, like that of San Diego, have gotten in trouble as a result. But there is no evidence that this is true in New York. In fact, as a result of the more conservative approach used by North, NYC has been in- creasing its pension contributions in recent years, from $1.1 billion in 2001 to $4.7 billion this year. This has helped adjust for recent years of low returns in the stock market.

Mel Aaronson, USO Treasurer and one of three teacher representa- tives on the TRS Board, told Clarion that he and the other trustees “will vehemently oppose any move to fund the Retirement System to ensure ade- quate funding.” He emphasized that TRS is in a strong financial position, has enough funds to pay retirees’ pensions for their entire lifetimes, and will also have enough to pay all those who have not yet retired.” CUNY foundations are also in a strong legal position, Aaronson not- ed: “The constitution of the State of New York guarantees that no pub- lic employee pension benefit can ever be diminished or impaired.”

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HEALTH CARE

The unraveling of private insurance

By LEONARD RODBERG
Queen's College

"Rising health care costs are undermining the institution of employer-based coverage. We...may well be seeing the whole institution unraveling....This is the byproduct of what should be a good thing: advances in medical technology."


A
mericans spend more on health care than anyone else on earth. We are first in spending, but, according to recent surveys, 11th in public satisfaction with our health system. Per person, our government spending alone is more than government plus private spending on health care in any other country. And yet our health statistics are comparatively poor, with life expectancy 41st in the world, infant mortality 27th, and more than 45 million people without any health insurance at all. So why does the US spend so much and get so little in return? Because of one simple fact: we are alone in the world in relying on private insurance to fund health care.

ONLY IN AMERICA

Many countries have a “single-payer” system, like Canada, in which the government directly funds a system of universal coverage. Some countries (e.g., France or Germany) use employer-supported, nonprofit sickness funds — industry-wide insurance plans created with the support of their union movements. But every economically developed nation funds its health care system through some kind of government-run regulatory or funding mechanism that makes sure everyone has coverage and that costs are controlled.

In the US, employer-based health insurance was a significant advance when it was created by the labor movement in the mid-1900s. It was greatly expanded during World War II and reached its peak of coverage in the 1950s. But now this system, and the collection of private insurance companies it spawned, is a barrier to access to health care for millions of Americans, including union members.

America’s current health insurance system is:
 ◎ Wasteful. More than 20% of our spending on health care in this country is simply for administering our multiplier, for-profit insurance system.
 ◎ Inflationary. The insurance system is good at denying or delaying care, but incapable of controlling costs and encouraging the efficient use of medical technology.
 ◎ Obsolete. It is focused on treating illness when the major modern diseases — heart disease, cancer and stroke — are most effectively dealt with through prevention.

As costs rise, the number of employers who offer health insurance today could not afford to buy a policy that would really give them adequate coverage. Today, the average policy for an individual costs more than $4,000 per year and, for a family, over $10,000 each year. Clearly someone earning the minimum wage ($10,000 per year for full-time work) could not afford to purchase health insurance for her or his family.

While the Massachusetts plan envisions state subsidies that might lower the price for some people, these will be too limited to assure access to quality care. In the end, residents of Massachusetts will be required to spend a lot of money in exchange for very poor coverage.

FOR-PROFIT PROBLEMS

Nor is an individual mandate the solution to the problem. The State of Massachusetts recently passed legislation to create an “affordable” insurance plan and require everyone without other insurance to purchase such a policy. The American Medical Association supports such an individual mandate, and other states are considering the idea.

What’s wrong with it? After all, anyone owning a car is required to have car insurance. The simple answer is that most people who don’t have health insurance today could not afford to buy a policy that would really give them adequate coverage. Today, the average policy for an individual costs more than $4,000 per year and, for a family, over $10,000 each year. Clearly someone earning the minimum wage ($10,000 per year for full-time work) could not afford to purchase health insurance for her or his family.

The US spends more, but gets less.

POEMS

Three by Idrá Novey

The Good Season
Morning, and the woman in the studio below begins to coax her first student at the piano, which notes to play softer, play slower, and I think of Henry, repeating his theory on the lottery, that the best numbers come between two beats of hesitation. He never won, never bought the fleet of red pickups he’d promised. And at the thought of those mythic vehicles, my grandpa Henry hunching with the sacks of coins he’d packed and re-packed for us, trying to make of them a more imposing legacy, I slip deeper into the bedding, listening for the lesson to end, the boy to master Bach’s Fantasy and Fugue, and cringe for him, sitting there idle, that quiet reckoning—the terrible likelihood of failure—while my neighbor plays it through, song rising through the floor, fluid and assured, free of error.

The Detainee
Little remained of her beyond the flame in her knees and a faint ringing in the farthest reaches of her mind. Outside, somewhere, she knew a girl still dragged a stick through wet sand, sang a song to herself, the lyrics like the furniture of the dead. From within the lake, its neck lowered for a drink, press the cover back, remembering his own edition of La Necesidad de Raíces, the unearthing of a book buried in fear now found in a yard, or basement, and swiftly sold like the furniture of the dead.

The Need for Roots
A man lifts a blue leather volume of Simone Weil from “$3, brushes off a film of dirt. “Buried,” the vendor says, “in a yard with those other leather ones. Two kids brought them all in a wheelbarrow.” The man nods, it’s a common story eleven years after Pinochet: the unearthing of a book buried in fear now found in a yard, or basement, and swiftly sold like the furniture of the dead.

The vendor slips his hands into his pockets, thinks how awkward it is to barter over what’s been buried. And then the bartering begins.

Idrá Novey’s chapbook The Next Country was a winner of the 2005 Poetry Society of America Chapbook Contest. Her selected translations of Brazilian poet Paulo Hen- ríques Britto received a PEN Translation Fund Award and will be published by BOA Editions. Novey has taught at Columbia University and the Catholic University of Chile in Valparaíso, where she lived for a number of years while working as a translator.

The US spends more, but gets less.
The war is one part of a right-wing political agenda. If we don’t change this toxic political climate there will be no bread, no butter, offered for us, now or in the future.

James Davis: Our students are well-situated to understand the trade-off the federal government is making, between military spend- ing and education, health, and social programs. They can see that tuition hikes and threats to student loans are a function of some very bad priorities among public officials, and some of them saw the concrete struggle of their professors and staff in the same light. They can see the government’s hostility toward funding education, and the role the war budget plays in that calculus.

Pittman: That’s very true. And sometimes it may seem logical for campus anti-war organizing to focus on students, because in many ways they’re the ones most directly affected, the ones most likely to be killed. But I think it’s equally important to organize our colleagues who work at CUNY. They are also greatly affected by the war, by the disappearing budget and by how it changes the political and intellectual atmosphere here for all of us.

Davies: This war’s a concern for our union not just because it’s an assault on justice, which is something every union should care about, but also because of what it’s meant for the freedom of expression, the right to dis- sent and the right to critical information – of particular concern to us in academia.

Pittman: Those issues weigh heavily at John Jay, where the criminal justice “mission” of the college means there’s more resistance among some to look critically at policies conducted in the name of “anti-terrorism.” Still, we had a very successful meeting last May with Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights discussing some of the Guantánamo cases. It was eye-opening for many of our students.

Moss: I think anti-war work can also make our union stronger because it helps bring in new people. If I first got involved with the union because of its anti-war organizing, Most of the faculty and staff who have gotten involved in anti-war work at CUNY are active in the union – anti-war organizing has brought new people and new energy into our union chapter.

How the war affects us at CUNY

Clarin October 2006

How does PSC anti-war organizing work?

There are a number of ways that work, from hosting speakers to screening, to an on-campus protest that was very exciting for many of our students. We screened the film “Honest Recruiter” which explains exactly what the enlistment contract really means. We also gave students forms that permit them to opt out of the requirement, under the Solomon Amendment, that colleges furnish student information to the military.

Our PSC chapter requested that we be informed when military recruiters come to the campus and that student representatives be present on the college’s website, which was helpful. Most of the information we obtained about the military was downloaded here.

We also made a point of working with veterans among the BC students. Last semester we brought in speakers from Iraq Voices Against the War, as well as someone from the ACLU to discuss the current assault on civil liberties. We’ve combined educational events like these with in-the-streets activism.

We organized a march from the campus to a nearby recruiting station at Flatbush and Nostrand Avenues, where we held a banner and placards, chanted, blew whistles and handed out counter-recruitment information. This was very well received by the public, and helped galvanize our group. This event and the vigil we held on the main quad when the 2,000th US soldier was killed have been our largest activities so far.

Cowen: At Queens, we formed the PSC Anti-War Committee, which includes faculty, students and staff. We also reached out to teachers and students at Townsend Harris High School, next to our campus and affiliated with Queens College.

We’ve organized a range of activity – from counter-recruitment work, to a monthly film screening, to an on-campus protest that

how the war affects us at CUNY
Dept. chairs meet at PSC

Discuss new contract provisions

By PETER HOGNESS

In September, PSC officers sat down with department chairs from across CUNY to discuss provisions of the new union contract. Close to 100 chairs and their representatives attended the two meetings—one on September 8 for chairs at community colleges, and another a week later for those at senior colleges and doctoral programs. Union staff who work on grievances, arbitrations and legal affairs also took part.

“I certainly learned a lot,” said Andrew Beveridge, chair of the Sociology Department at Queens College. “It was very useful to have a clear union perspective on what’s in the contract, so that we don’t have to rely only on how it is characterized by our administration.”

ARMED WITH INFORMATION

Beveridge said it hadn’t taken long to put this information to work: “I’ve used what I learned already to tell the [college] administration that I know there’s plenty of money to support sabbaticals and these other new things in the contract,” he told Clarion. “So it was very useful to get that information out there.”

Andrea Boyar, chair of Lehman College’s Health Sciences Department, said: “For me, the meeting was valuable in that information about new faculty members was made much clearer—in terms of their 24 hours of released time and the change in the tenure clock. That I found very helpful.” Boyar noted that the two sessions, held at the PSC’s new office at 61 Broadway, “brought many people who don’t normally participate in union meetings to the union.”

“I just assumed my position as chair in July, so everything has been a learning process,” said Myung-Soo Lee, chair of Marketing and International Business at Baruch. At the start of the semester, Lee said, he hadn’t been able to answer some questions from members of his department. “Everything was crystal clear after leaving the session,” he said. “Now I can answer the questions of my departmental colleagues with confidence.”

Lee said that the meeting was helpful even on topics with which he was already more familiar. “Many of those points I may have heard here or there,” he explained. “But it’s not definitive until I hear from those who were directly involved in the contract negotiations.”

Bernard Klein has been chair of the Social Science Department at Kingsborough Community College for 40 years, and he said that most of the discussion about the contract was not new to him. Still, “these sessions are worthwhile,” Klein told Clarion. “I saw that many people were not so familiar with it,” he said. “And I got clearer on some aspects which were not quite clear before.”

Jo Ann Wein, chair of the Art Department at Queensborough Community College, said it was important to learn that the new contract not only contains the funding needed to increase the rate of sabbatical pay—it provides additional money to fund a larger number of sabbaticals. “This is how accurate information increases department chairs’ independence,” she said.

“I remember Barbara Bowen telling us, ‘The administration is going to try to take control of the contract and tell you what can and cannot be accomplished,’” said Wein. “She said, ‘Don’t let them do that! It is your contract—and if you are having any difficulties, call the union office and we will go to bat for you.’”

‘IT IS YOUR CONTRACT’

“IT IS YOUR CONTRACT’ was incredibly useful,” said Jo Ann Wein, chair of the Art Department at Baruch College. “I think the PSC would do well to have more interaction with [department] chairs. Being a chair can be an absolutely miserable job, and any help you can get is gold.”

In this case, she said, “there’s a lot of misinformation about the contract that gets spread around, and it was important to correct that.”

Boyar and Beveridge also urged more regular meetings in the future, and Klein suggested that PSC officers meet with chairs to discuss contract demands before negotiations with CUNY begin.

PSC Treasurer Mike Fabricant, who is also executive officer of the doctoral program in social welfare at the Graduate Center, said that the September meetings were just a start. “I was struck by the sense of dialogue,” he said. “It went beyond the presenters offering information, to the department chairs talking among themselves about their role.”

PSC officers urged department chairs to contact union officers with any suggestions.

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