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YOUR RIGHTS
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HEALTH & SAFETY
RSI – Repetitive Strain Illness
It’s the leading cause of health problems in the US workplace today and there are no national guidelines for safety. But you can take steps to help prevent it.

CULTURE
Strummer in the struggle
Former Clash guitarist Joe Strummer, 50, recently died. He could do more than play the guitar – he was an ardent supporter of labor rights in Britain.

NEXT CONTRACT
Mass meeting set for May 12
PSC members can discuss the new contract demands.
PSC-CUNY Grants
Committee on faculty research funds

The PSC-CUNY Research Award Program needs faculty members to help distribute grants in their area of expertise. Interested full-time faculty can volunteer or nominate colleagues to join the University Committee on Research Awards (UCRA); those who serve on the UCRA will help form grant review panels, establish grant guidelines and select recipients. The deadline for nominations is May 12.

Many areas

The UCRA is looking for people to coordinate each of the following areas:
- Art history and visual arts
- Comparative literature and languages
- Computer science
- Education
- Health and human services
- Health sciences
- Psychology and physiological psychology
- Sociology

Applicants are recommended by the University Faculty Senate Committee on Research and appointed by the Chancellor. An in-service allotment is provided for service on the UCRA ($6,000 over three years of service).

For more information call Stasia Pasela at the UFS office at 212-794-5388 or e-mail her at Stasia.Pasela@mail.cuny.edu.

The PSC joined the New York Public Library Guild (AFSCME Local 1930) in April at a rally against layoffs at City Libraries. At center is Local 1930 President Ray Markey.

How to solve State budget crisis

Both Republican and Democratic state legislators, as well as the media, constantly talk about the state's $11 billion revenue tax cut. They talk about the shortfall as if it were a condition beyond anyone's control. They talk about the shortfall as if it were an act of nature, like a drought. The only reason to support their case is to say, “Well, if our first two-thirds of the money is cut, there is nothing we can do.” But there is. There must be a non-conservation approach to solving the problem. It is one of the constant frustrations that there is never enough room for every relevant detail. We stand by the accuracy of our reporting, but are glad to publish Appleman and Pecorino's letter that provides some additional context.

At the January Delegate Assembly, chapters were asked to discuss the USLAW resolution and report back to the February DA, where a vote would be held. In chapter meetings at BMCC, Flatbush, Brooklyn, CCNY, CCNY, City Tech, Queens and York and in an online discussion at LA GUARDIA, member comments strongly supported the USLAW resolution. QCC's online comments are described above; the union's other chapters did not organize discussions.

Connect the dots

Most PSC members do not think of tax cuts as a position, based on such a small response. It should also be noted that previous e-mail and department policy on similar issues have been thoroughly mixed at QCC.

Additionally, the article says that QCC was the only chapter where comments ran against USLAW. Among those chapters reporting at the DA, QCC was the only one that did not participate in the discussion. Several chapters did not report and thus their responses are unknown.

Jay Appleman, QCC Chapter Chair
Phil Pecorino, QCC Vice-Chair

Editor's note: It's one of the constant frustrations that there is never enough room for every relevant detail. We stand by the accuracy of our reporting, but are glad to publish Appleman and Pecorino's letter that provides some additional context.

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Connect the dots

Most PSC members connect the dots: billions for unwinding “preemptive war” (Iraq is only the first), tax breaks for the wealthy, assaults on civil liberties and the economy, the enormous toll that a war budget takes on our public institutions, and management of the news by the Bush administration.

A few of us serve on PSC's International Committee and are trying to put together a curriculum on the war. I know that many of my colleagues have connected the dots in their classrooms. Have any of you talked in your classrooms about the war? Do you have any useful Web sites, articles or curriculum ideas you can share?

If you'd like to help create and distribute a curriculum on war, peace and justice, please contact the PSC International Committee by e-mail (miriam_thompson@qc.edu or srausher@nycrr.com).

Miriam Thompson
Queens College

TIAA-CREF responds

In the March Clarion, a letter to the editor titled “Prisoners of TIAA-CREF” cited provisions for CUNY’s retirement plan accumulations. Several points require clarification.

● It is ineligible for retiree health care, CUNY permits two-thirds of the account to be cashed out. While market fluctuations affect amounts, employees retain ownership of the funds; TIAA does not “appropriate additional funds.” One-third of the account cannot be cashed out so that funds are available for health coverage. TIAA-CREF, MetLife and The Guardian are required to ad-here to this CUNY policy. Alternate payment options are available for this one-third.

● In 1991, TIAA introduced moving TIAA traditional accumulations into variable accounts for all participants including CUNY employees.

● Rollovers from CUNY’s Retirement Plan to an IRA maintain the penalty-free withdrawal status; earnings accrued in IRAs do not. A tax advisor should be consulted for personal situations.

Article 27 of the Agreement between CUNY and TIAA-CREF states “members of the OEP who have separated from CUNY service and are collecting a retirement benefit on their service at CUNY shall be eligible for coverage in the City Health Insurance Program.” Therefore, employees must receive annuity income or interest payments on at least a minimum portion of their accumulation.

For additional information, please meet with a TIAA-CREF Consultant who visits your campus monthly.

Rosemary Markowski
TIAA-CREF

Write to Clarion
Letters should be no more than 150-200 words in length and are subject to editing.
Contract demands move forward

Delegates to vote May 1

By PETER HOGNESS

After months of preparation that included membership surveys, small committee work, input by union delegates and intensive research by the negotiating committee, the PSC Executive Council presented a proposed list of contract demands to the union’s March Delegate Assembly.

Delegates will vote on the demands at their next meeting, on May 1, and the approved list of demands will be published in Clarion. On May 12 there will be a mass membership meeting on the contract, where members can discuss the demands with the PSC’s negotiating team.

The union has been preparing for this round of collective bargaining since the fall. On September 25, 2002, the PSC sent CUNY management a formal request to open bargaining and to start with the subject of intellectual property, an area unresolved in the last contract. But management did not agree to begin with intellectual property, and the PSC subsequently filed charges at the Public Employment Relations Board.

MEMBERS’ IDEAS

Meanwhile the Executive Council studied the results of the fall membership survey and listened to hundreds of delegates and members with ideas for demands. The result is a shorter and more focused list than the one that delegates approved in 2000.

“When the last negotiations began, we laid out an agenda for transforming CUNY,” PSC President Barbara Bowen told Clarion. “We have kept that perspective, but now we’re in a position to move directly to our key issues.”

Behind each demand, Bowen said, are months of research and analysis. The bargaining team examined the last negotiations, looking at both the PSC’s gains and the demands that were not won. Detailed study of union contracts at other universities helped shape the new contract proposals, and both the December and January meetings of the Delegate Assembly discussed which issues should be the PSC’s priority demands.

A key test for each proposed demand was whether members would mobilize in its support. “We can have all the logical arguments we want,” Bowen explained, “but that’s not enough. In the last round of negotiations, we saw that while arguments are important, bargaining is really about power.” Member mobilization is especially important at a time of austerity budgets, she added: “We need to recognize the current economic situation without capitulating to it.”

The draft demands, approved by the Executive Council on March 20, fall into several basic categories. Economic demands include pay increases for all titles, so that CUNY salaries will again be competitive with other major universities. Another focus is job security, a particularly pressing issue for HEOS, CLTs and part-time faculty. On workload, the proposal calls for an overall reduction in teaching load to bring CUNY in line with other universities, and for redressing inequities that affect specific job titles and colleges.

Equity for adjuncts is addressed in demands on pay, time and leave, seniority, professional treatment and benefits. The proposed package also includes specific demands for librarian and counseling faculty, and for PSC members at the Education- al Opportunity Centers and the Hunter College Campus Schools.

In several sections there is an emphasis on quality-of-life concerns, such as health and family issues. Proposed improvements in child care and family leave provisions aim to make CUNY a more “family-friendly” workplace. Other parts of the package would strengthen the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund and tighten health and safety protections. Improvements in the grievance procedure are also on the agenda.

Watching what you read

By TOMIO GERON

Students, faculty and staff use libraries at CUNY on a daily basis, studying everything from poetry to physics to protest movements. But there are growing concerns that they could be watched.

Librarians and booksellers across the country are worried by provisions of new security legislation that make it easier for government to gather data on people’s reading habits. “America’s libraries are disturbed by the PATRIOT Act,” library faculty member Scott White wrote in a recent LaGuardia newsletter. The Act “provides law enforcement officials with broader surveillance powers that lessen the current legal standards needed to obtain search warrants.” White explained, “and forces libraries to surrender circulation and user information records.”

At least one CUNY library has reportedly had an FBI inquiry since the Act was passed. At Bronx Community College (BCC), last July, Assistant to the Vice President for Administration and Finance Alyce Zimmerman called an administrative assistant in the library’s Learning Resource Center (LRC) and asked for sign-in sheets for computer use from certain dates. The request was never fulfilled.

LRC supervisor Laroi Lawton was on vacation, but was disturbed to learn of the incident upon his return – especially when Zimmerman told him that the records had been needed for the FBI and other law enforcement officials. “On one level, I can understand what they were doing,” said Lawton, “but on another level, this is intrusive.” One of the things I told [administrators] is that I felt we’d been violated,” Lawton told Clarion that had he been there, he would have resisted turning over the information.

The inquiry focused on a student at BCC, but it is unclear exactly why the government’s interest was aroused. “Someone got into a Web site that they shouldn’t have,” was all that Zimmerman would tell Clarion. BCC administrators would not say whether the investigation fell under the PATRIOT Act or normal criminal law.

Details of the case “are really not open to disclosure,” said BCC legal counsel Mary Rogan.

Theresa McManus, chief librarian at BCC, would not comment on the specifics of the incident. But she did say that those working in CUNY libraries should not give patron records to administrators without being shown a subpoena or search warrant, as happened in this case. “It’s part of professional ethics,” McManus said. “My policy is they would never just offer it up. If my boss came and said, want to see who checked out this book? I’d say, ‘I’m sorry this is confidential.’”

A New York State law adopted in response to past FBI abuses states that library records should be treated as confidential, except when information is sought with a subpoena or a court order.

Records of which books individuals check out of CUNY libraries are deleted from the system after the book is returned, according to McManus. Sign-in sheets for computer use in BCC’s Learning Resource Center used to be saved in order to compile an anonymous end-of-semes- ter report on computer usage – but Lawton said he now compiles that information daily and then destroys the sheets.

GUIDELINES?

If a librarian is presented with a subpoena or a search warrant from the FBI as part of a PATRIOT Act investigation, the Act states that he or she is not allowed to tell others. But an anonymous survey of over 900 US public libraries, conducted in October 2002 by Dr. Leigh Estabrook of the University of Illinois Library Research Center, found that over 10% had recently faced FBI or other law enforcement inquiries about their patrons.

A similar survey of PSC members working in CUNY libraries drew 41 responses out of 300 questionnaires sent out. These included only one report of questioning by FBI or other law enforcement, a sec- ond report of action taken by the FBI as part of a PATRIOT Act investigation, the Act states that he or she is not allowed to tell others. But an anonymous survey of over 900 US public libraries, conducted in October 2002 by Dr. Leigh Estabrook of the University of Illinois Library Research Center, found that over 10% had recently faced FBI or other law enforcement inquiries about their patrons.

A survey of PSC members working in CUNY libraries drew 41 responses out of 300 questionnaires sent out. These included only one report of questioning by FBI or other law enforcement, a second report of action taken by the FBI as part of a PATRIOT Act investigation, the Act states that he or she is not allowed to tell others. But an anonymous survey of over 900 US public libraries, conducted in October 2002 by Dr. Leigh Estabrook of the University of Illinois Library Research Center, found that over 10% had recently faced FBI or other law enforcement inquiries about their patrons.

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Ford said that librarians are worried about the effect of the PATRIOT Act on civil liberties and student privacy. “It is a major concern because we don’t want to be in a position to have to give up information freely,” she said. “It has an impact on students and their ability to trust us in what we do.”

Many librarians and booksellers believe the Act infringes on the constitutional right to privacy, said LaGuardia’s White. “I think it’ll be challenged as unconstitutional in the courts,” said White. “I think that cooler heads will eventually prevail.”
Your rights under the contract

Implementation is the key issue

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

The articles in this series so far have tried to clarify some of the major innovations of the current contract: adjunct professional hours, re- assigned time for untenured faculty, HEO workload committees and other issues. It has been gratifying to see that what was at first vexed has now become fairly routine, at least on most campuses. None of this has happened without intervention by the union, but part-time faculty are now regularly being paid for office hours. College Language Immersion teachers have finally received their longevity increments, untenured faculty have begun to plan for reassigned time, and the HEO workload committees have started to convene. The structural change we worked for in the contract has begun. But only begun: some members have found that the new features are not being implemented smooth- ly, and the union has already been forced to grieve infractions.

LEGALLY BINDING

Please let us know or contact your chapter chair if you’re finding that the new elements of the contract are not being observed on your campus. There is no excuse for failure to implement the contract; its provisions are legally binding.

That the union has to do battle with management to implement a contract to which they agreed is absurd. I find it especially so when PSC members have responded as never before to the call to support the University in its struggle to gain budget restorations from Albany. The two contractual elements I discuss here have been particularly subject to managerial foot-dragging, and the union continues to work both on the campus and from the central office to press for resolution of remaining issues. With this month’s column on contractual rights comes a message to management: when we enter a new round of collective bargaining, the best way to create a productive climate for negotiations is to stop forcing the union to fight for implementation of rights we have already won.

Pay for department chairs during annual leave

Department chairs give extraordinary service to CUNY. As faculty members elected by their peers, they carry the heaviest burden of the shared governance on which a university is built. They often put their own research agendas on hold to devote three years or more to their colleagues. With the steady erosion of public funds from CUNY, the chairs’ job has become even harder: they find themselves stretching department budgets and lobbying for full-time faculty lines, administering large cohorts of part-time faculty, and making difficult decisions about their nearest colleagues. This contractual provi- sion, if properly implemented, could go a long way toward sus- taining the moral fiber of the university community.

PRORATED SALARY

The heart of the provision is that department chairs will be paid a pro- rated portion of their normal salaries if their departments are designated as requiring one or two months of work by the chair during the contractual annual leave. Annual leave, as defined in Article 14.2 of the contract and revised in the current agreement, extends from the day after spring Commencement until August 30th of that year (or for an equivalent consecutive period). During this time, full- time teaching faculty are officially on leave from all college responsi- bilities.

Especially with the inordinately heavy teaching loads we carry at CUNY, annual leave is essential time for one’s own research, writing and creative work — also for rest. A symptom of the increasing managerial control of academic life is a blurring of the boundary between work and private life; we all have

something at stake in protecting annual leave. Department chairs who agree to work for their departments during this period should be compensated at their normal rate of salary.

ADMINISTRATIVE

If the department is designated as requiring one month of additional work during the summer annual leave, the chair will receive one- ninth of his or her annual salary; if the department is designated as requiring two additional months, the chair receives two-ninths of the annual salary. (Faculty salaries are for nine months of work, paid over 12 months.) The provision should be simple: it acknowledges that de- partments have often required administrative work during the period when faculty are contractually on leave, and provides for fair payment for chairs who do. Management, however, has made it difficult by

mand. We are well within our rights in insisting that it be implemented.

The provision also must be imple- mented as written. Some college presidents have offered department chairs lump sums for summer work or proposed that chairs work at the pro- rata rate for less than a month. The contract is control- ling: individual arrange- ments by college presi- dents with department chairs, however well in- tentioned, would be in violation of the agreement.

With that said, let me clarify how it should work. The agreement states that the “President of the college, after consultation with the De- partment Chairperson, shall designate each department as having a nine-month, a ten-month, or an eleven-month Department Chair- person.” The designation is of the department, not the individual who serves as chair.

The only exception to the right of the President to make the designation is the case of an incumbent department chair, in that case, the chair is required to agree to the designation. But where an elec- tion is being held this spring, the agreement states that the president must make the designation “no lat- ter than one month before the elec- tion.” On many campuses, that hasn’t happened, and the PSC has been forced to file a grievance to make it work.

DEPARTMENT STATUS

Because the timing for designa- tion of the department’s status is tied to departmental chair elections, it would be possible for college pres- idents to make determinations this spring about some departments and not others. The PSC insisted that current department chairs not be forced to accept summer work, but we did not want the implementation of this provision to be dragged out over three years. The union has taken the position that the only equ- alitable way to implement this provision is to make the designation of all departments at once, for summer 2003. Otherwise, chairs in different departments will be paid at different rates, a situation the union finds un- acceptable.

The agreement does not specify criteria for designa- tion of a department as requiring one or two months of work by the chair in the summer, but it does set the normal con- tractual limit on hours for administrative work: 120 hours of professional obliga- tion per month. The addi- tional month or months of work need not occur in the same calendar month — for instance, the time could be split between the beginning and the end of the summer – but the ad- ditional time must be in one-month increments. Chairs have enumerated many responsibilities that might constitute additional work during their annual leave.

EXISTING PRACTICES

One final point is that the union won an explicit guarantee in the contract that the designation of a de- partment as requiring nine, ten or eleven months of work “shall not af- fect existing agreed-upon practices concerning coverage of the Depart- ment Chairperson’s duties when he/she is unavailable to perform them.” If active scholars and re- searchers are to continue accepting positions as department chairs, it is essential that current practices al- lowing for occasional substitute chairs continue.

Unfortunately, the Memorandum from CUNY’s Office for Faculty and Staff Relations to college presidents is in error on this issue; it states, “The University bargained for the services of the officer Department Chairperson, not an ad hoc substitute.” This is flatly contradicted by the contractual agreement, which is explicit that “agreed-upon practices concerning coverage of the Department Chairperson’s duties when he/she is unavailable to perform them.”
HEO and CLT professional fund

For the first time, the contract gives Higher Education Officers and College Labor Technicians access to substantial funds to support professional development. The contract ensured funding at half a million dollars every year for this purpose. The union and the University are considering a proposal that the PSC manage the funds, which will be placed in a separate account. The union’s lawyers will work with the University to ensure that we meet the legal requirements for such accounts. We expect that the fund will be administered by a board of trustees, and it will report publicly on how the money is disbursed.

A committee of HEOs, CLTs and members of the negotiating team has been meeting to develop implementation plans. To apply for funding, a HEO or CLT will submit a short application form providing details of the proposed budget and a description of the project. Appropriate projects are as varied as the work CLTs and HEOs do: a HEO who works in student services might seek funding for a course on developing Web sites to communicate with students; a CLT who works in the slide room of an art department might apply for travel to visit major museums and improve the department’s collection of slides; a HEO who runs a Caribbean Studies program might ask to attend an academic conference at the University of the West Indies; a CLT who works in a chemistry lab might seek advanced training in new scientific equipment.

The goal of the fund is to enhance the professional lives of our members who do non-teaching academic work.

The plan is for decisions on applications to be made by a panel that includes two HEOs, two CLTs and one management designee. The HEOs and CLTs on the panel will be chosen for their experience with professional development and grant funding. We have modeled the decision-making process on the PSC-CUNY Award: applications will be judged on a professional, academic basis, as decisions will be final. Whether there will be one panel for all applications or panels at each campus is still being ironed out. The amount of money available for each campus and CUNY central office where HEOs’ work will be proportional to the number of HEOs and CLTs at each workplace. In the interests of fairness, preference in awarding grants in subsequent years will be given to those who have not yet received funding. Applicants are free to request any amount up to $2,000, depending on the nature of their projects. At the completion of the project, applicants will be asked to submit a brief account of their work, similar to the one faculty submit on completion of a PSC-CUNY grant.

Time spent on funded projects has to be approved by the individual’s supervisor, but will not be charged to annual leave. Once you receive the grant and your supervisor’s approval on the scheduling, the days you spend on a funded activity will be considered part of your job. Union and management are still finalizing the process for gaining the supervisor’s approval for activities that require time during working hours, and we will notify HEOs and CLTs of the details in a separate letter on the fund.

ALLOCATION

Because of the delay in starting the grant program this year, funds from this year’s allocation will be available for grants next year. No money will be lost, or absorbed into the general budget. Our hope, shared by management, is that in future years all the funds will be disbursed during the academic year in which they are allocated so that there can be maximum use of the grant. HEOs and CLTs will hear from the PSC directly about the details of the application form and the timing of submissions. The union also plans to offer workshops on grant applications for those who haven’t had experience with applications; many of our HEOs and CLTs have secured major grants for the University and themselves, and will be willing to provide guidance to others. The establishment of this fund has taken too long, but it will be a real boon to our members when it begins to work, a major advance in recognizing the professional needs of CUNY’s professional staff. — 88
State budget up for grabs

This year’s New York State budget battle is different—and not only because of the astonishing overall deficit of $11.5 billion.

Governor Pataki’s budget would slash State funding for CUNY by over $100 million, a 12.5% reduction. Senior colleges would be hit with an $82 million cut; community colleges would see base aid reduced by $345 per full-time equivalent student. Higher education opportunity programs such as SEEK would lose half of their funding statewide.

Pataki is calling for a CUNY tuition hike of up to $1,200, with simultaneous cuts in financial aid.

Unions and other critics argue that this year’s budget crisis is self-inflicted, a consequence of past decisions to reduce State revenues. They note that Pataki has pushed through $13 billion in tax cuts in the last eight years, largely to the benefit of New York’s wealthy. Legislative support for some kind of tax increase is growing, but the governor says he remains opposed.

DEADLINE PASSES

State legislators missed the April 1 deadline for adopting a new budget, for the 19th year in a row. In the past, a budget was often not passed until months later. But this year, the severity of the crisis may lead to an earlier resolution: with tax collections down, the problem only gets worse with every passing day.

In early March, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno and Pataki agreed on a revenue estimate of $40.3 billion for the new fiscal year. Agreement on a common figure is the first step in budget negotiations, and in other years this has not occurred until the summer.

But a bumpy road still lies ahead. Early April saw the collapse of a tentative deal on borrowing $4.2 billion against money owed to New York from tobacco lawsuits.

Most statehouse observers expect a budget by May—but with so much in flux and the bargaining behind closed doors, there are few predictions about what this year’s budget agreement will look like.

Members of the PSC Legislative Committee, officers and other activists visited members of the Assembly and State Senate throughout March and April, both in their districts and in Albany. The union’s message was that the Legislature must restore and increase State funds for CUNY. The grass-roots lobbyists emphasized that restoring cuts to TAP and community college base aid—which the Legislature has done in recent years—is not enough; senior college cuts must be restored as well.

Every PSC chapter took part in a huge postcard campaign against the CUNY cuts, with a big push on the March 26 “CUNY Day of Action.” On April 14, a union delegation delivered 165,453 cards signed by students, faculty, staff and community members to Governor Pataki in Albany (see cover). Meanwhile campus chapters are busy signing people up for a massive “March for Public Education” on May 3 (see story at right).

These efforts were combined with a media campaign: in March and April, a PSC television ad ran in Albany and on NY1 in New York City (see inset photo at left). “Protect the future,” the ad concludes. “STOP the cuts at the City University of New York.” (You can see the ad at www.psc-cuny.org/edadv.htm.)

All this PSC activity was part of a growing outcry from unions and community groups against Pataki’s effort to slash public services. Over 30,000 health care workers flooded the capital on April 1 to protest against $2 billion in proposed health care cuts. Also, a coalition of labor groups, including NY State United Teachers, CWA and the New York State AFL-CIO, bought television ads to urge a fair tax program instead of drastic cuts to education and health care.

In mid-April, Bruno and Silver said they had reached a “conceptual agreement” to restore $1.9 billion of Pataki’s cuts, but kept mum on details. The governor blasted their announcement, and Bruno admitted that the two-house deal could fall apart.

Seventy-seven percent of New Yorkers think that some form of tax increase should be used to solve the budget deficit, according to a February poll. Only 16% said that the budget shortfall should be solved entirely through spending cuts.

A Day of Action

A wave of action swept across the city as all CUNY campuses participated in the March 26 CUNY Day of Action. Clockwise from left (on this page): over 300 students attend a reading by Piri Thomas, author of Down These Mean Streets, at York College; Anthony Andrews, member of the PSC Legislative Committee, urges the crowd at York to go to Albany; PSC Legislative Director Cecelia McCall speaks with City Council member John Liu at the PSC CUNY Day breakfast; a student at LaGuardia Community College signs a letter to state legislators.
May 3 is your best chance to have an impact on the State budget cuts proposed for CUNY.

A massive “March for Public Education” will be held in Albany on that day, timed for maximum impact on the budget debate. With a final deal expected by mid-May, the march and rally will probably occur when lawmakers are in the midst of crucial decisions on education funding. Organizers aim to make this the biggest demonstration that Albany has ever seen.

“We’ve rented the buses, we have a permit, we’ve told the press and the politicians,” said PSC President Barbara Bowen. “Now there’s only one question - will you be there?” Bowen urged members and students to sign up for a seat on one of the many union-sponsored buses that will leave from CUNY campuses. “If you have ever felt that it’s an outrage that public higher education is not funded in this state, this is your chance to press for an alternative,” she told Clarion. “Even if you haven’t thought of yourself as an activist, this is a critical moment. It’s crucial that we have a strong showing from CUNY faculty and staff - our numbers will be counted.”

Governor Pataki has proposed a 12.5% cut to CUNY’s budget, and tuition increases of up to $1,200 per year. School districts statewide are facing deep cuts as the state looks to plug a $13.5 billion budget deficit – the largest in real dollars since the Great Depression.

But the march and rally – from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at the Empire State Plaza in Albany – is not just to turn back this year’s cuts. Organizers hope it will set the stage for years of State support for education. “We’re not just directing this at this year’s budget,” said Tony Bifaro, spokesperson for New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), one of the main organizers of the rally, “but on long-term infrastructure and investment for education for this state.” The protest will highlight need for new State revenues to ensure high-quality education.

ALL LEVELS

The march aims to unite those concerned about every level of learning, from pre-K through post-grad. By early April, over 20,000 people had already signed up to attend. PSC chapters throughout CUNY have been signing members up for the trip. “We’re getting an overwhelming response from students, faculty and staff who want to go,” said Joan Greenbaum, chair of the PSC chapter at LaGuardia, which signed up over 100 students, staff and faculty during the March 26 CUNY Day of Action.

“They’ve been writing letters, sending faxes and now they want to go to Albany,” Greenbaum said. “They’re very enthusiastic about wanting to do something, and they recognize that we have to respond on many fronts.”

To sign up for a seat on the bus, PSC members can either contact their campus chapter chair or fax in the coupon below. Buses will depart from CUNY campuses at approximately 8:00 am, and return around 7:00 in the evening. A free lunch and bottled water will be provided, and everyone who goes will get a free PSC hat. There will be entertainment before the rally starts, and plenty of food vendors and restrooms during the day.

The coalition organizing the demonstration includes virtually every education organization in the state. It was initiated by the two major umbrella groups on public education, the New York State Educational Conference Board and Public Higher Education Conference Board, and has grown to include advocacy groups such as the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Citizen Action and the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. In the unlikely event that a State budget is passed before May 3, the march will still go forward.

“Many people who support public education are coming together,” said PSC Secretary Cecelia McCull, chair of the union’s Legislative Committee. “We’re sending a message that public education must be funded. Public higher education must be a large and visible part of that message – and that’s why PSC members and their students and families must come to Albany on May 3.”

**TICKET TO ALBANY**

**NAME:**

**HOME PHONE:**

**EMAIL:**

**WORK PHONE:**

**WHICH CAMPUS TO GET ON BUS:**

Fax to 212-302-7815 or e-mail this info to macarlese@pscmail.org. For more info, contact your campus chapter chair or call Mary Ann Carlese at 212-354-1252, x225.
Welfare Fund dental changes

By TOMO GERON

As part of the effort to stabilize the PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund, the Fund will switch to a new dental plan provider, effective May 1, 2003.

After extensive discussion and analysis, the Welfare Fund has moved to Guardian DentalGuard Preferred, the third-largest dental administrator in the country. All members will receive detailed information about the new Guardian DentalGuard Preferred plan by May 1, 2003.

Under the Guardian plan, a dentist belonging to the Guardian network will charge according to a reduced fee schedule—typically a 35% discount from usual and customary fees. These negotiated fees will vary depending on the location of the dentist.

PREVENTION

Members out-of-pocket costs will be further reduced for selected procedures. The deepest reductions will be in preventive procedures, because medical evidence shows that preventative care is the most important factor in dental health.

The move is part of the WF’s effort to control costs. The Fund has run an operating deficit in 11 of the last 14 years, and currently spends $4 million per year on dental benefits. After extensive discussions with members (see Clarion, May 2003), the WF Trustees set a target of saving $1.5 million from the dental plan to help stabilize the Fund’s finances. “Unfortunately, there is no way to reduce costs by $1.5 million without reducing benefits for some,” said Steve London, PSC First Vice President and Welfare Fund Executive Officer. “While this has been a difficult process for the Trustees, we have been forced to take a new look at the Fund’s dental benefit to see how we can best get our money’s worth. It is true that some members will experience a hardship, but many will see an improvement in dental coverage.”

A major problem with the old SDS dental plan was that it paid participating dentists at very low rates—and as a result, there was a shrinking number of dentists in its network. When PSC members were asked about the SDS plan in the recent membership survey, most respondents said they did not use a dentist in the plan. Only 15%-20% used SDS dentists for expensive procedures. The new Guardian Plan will give members access to over 6,000 dentists in the tri-state area and more than 64,000 dentists nationwide, six times as many as before. The Trustees sought to balance the goal of getting PSC members the best price for dental services with the goal of obtaining the largest possible group of participating dentists.

IN OR OUT

Under the new plan, there will no longer be a deductible for participating or non-participating dentists. Out-of-network benefits will still be available, but for expensive out-of-network procedures the subsidy will be small.

The new plan does not have a separate orthodontia coverage or a separate fee schedule, but use of participating orthodontists will mean significant savings over the usual and customary fees. Those already in orthodontic care under the old plan as of April 1 will be allowed to complete their course of treatment.

On May 1, 2003, the day that the Guardian plan goes into effect, the SDS plan will end. After April 1, 2003, SDS will not process pre-estimates for dental work. Pre-estimates already issued by SDS must be completed and filed within six months.

If you have further questions after you receive the detailed information in the mail, call the Welfare Fund at 212-354-5230.

Affordable help with legal issues

$65 a year, from NYSUT

YOUR BENEFITS

The Greek American University Professionals of CUNY is an association of instructional and support staff employed in CUNY. Its goals are to promote networking among professionals, assist students and staff and offer programs of special interest to the Greek American community. To join or to be placed on the association’s mailing list, please contact its secretary, James Demetro, at 718-298-5376.

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Typing can hurt

Health & Safety

Ergonomics vs. politics
Business resists worker protections

By VERNON MOGENSEN

Repetitive strain illnesses (RSIs) are the leading cause of work-related safety and health problems in the United States today. RSIs impose enormous social costs on American workers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that more than 1.8 million American workers suffer from RSIs annually, one-third of which are serious enough to force workers to miss at least one workday. Victims of carpal tunnel syndrome, one of the most common forms of RSI, lose an average of 22 workdays, more than from any other illness. The economic cost to society of RSI-related injuries is estimated to be $50 billion a year.

Many repetitive-motion jobs are performed by women, but computer work stations are usually designed with a man’s physique in mind. This helps to explain why women suffer a disproportionately high percentage of RSIs. Among computer users, one important cause of RSIs is constantly flexing the wrist from side to side to reach different keys, or to move the mouse. Good typing guidelines include keeping the wrist in a neutral position: flat (not bent up or down) and straight (not bent left or right; see diagram below). Instead of moving your hand at the wrist while your arm stays immobile, use the larger muscles in your shoulders to move your entire arm, positioning your hand over the key you want to type. Similarly, you can move the mouse by using your entire arm, not just the wrist.

The safety and health needs of the worker – provides methods of preventing RSIs. It takes a holistic approach to the relationship between the work environment and human factors such as the worker’s muscles, tendons, joints and nerves. Ergonomics aims to improve job design in order to minimize monotonous and repetitive tasks, and limit work speed-ups, which may contribute to fatigue and stress. In addition, ergonomics also examines such topics as vision problems (for example, how fluorescent lighting contributes to screen glare), or how excessive noise and vibration contribute to stress.

Calls by organized labor and women’s groups for an ergonomics standard to prevent RSIs went unheeded by the Reagan and Bush administrations until the problem reached epidemic proportions in many workplaces. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was finally permitted to begin working on an ergonomics standard in 1990, but the effort ran into a massive corporate opposition. Led by the so-called National Coalition on Ergonomics, an alliance of more than 300 corporations and trade associations formed by the National Association of Manufacturers, opponents delayed completion of a standard for almost a decade.

Sound Science

Corporate critics claimed it would be too expensive and complicated to enforce, and asserted that RSIs were merely a matter of employee comfort, not safety and health. Earlier the Department of Labor had been critical in generating publicity and political support for the union.

Joe Strummer was a musician, recording artist and rock rebel whose opposition went beyond hol- low rhetoric, phoniness and resistance to the surface. We could use more like him.

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Joe Strummer was a musician, recording artist and rock rebel whose opposition went beyond hollow rhetoric, phoniness and resistance to the surface. We could use more like him.
Examining patients near the World Trade Center site or doing research on the streets of East Harlem may not be most doctors’ idea of a day at the office. But Dr. Steven Markowitz would have it no other way.

Markowitz, director of the Center for the Biology of Natural Systems (CBNS) at Queens College, seeks out projects that help those who don’t have access to proper health care. Most of his work is focused on occupational health and safety, assisting workers who have been exposed to health risks on the job.

That includes day laborers who did cleanup work in lower Manhattan after the World Trade Center was destroyed. “They were working with a lot of dust and they weren’t informed about that risk,” says Markowitz, adding that almost none of the workers had seen a doctor because they lacked health coverage.

With 9/11 disaster recovery funds, Markowitz and CBNS staff worked with the New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) and the Latin American Workers Project to create a mobile testing center.

“The workers were worried,” Markowitz says. “Most of them didn’t live in Manhattan, and made a special trip to get examined. In five weeks of testing, the Mobile Unit screened 418 people.”

They found that many of the workers had respiratory problems that lasted for months after they worked on the cleanup; to common were dizziness, poor appetite and sleeping problems, symptoms that cannot be attributed directly to dust. But prevention cannot be accomplished by offering medical care alone. In East Harlem, the South Bronx and the West Bronx, Markowitz has found that workers are worried about chemicals.

This type of medical work, on the street with patients who have little money, is something that few other physicians in the city can take on. “But it’s what Markowitz has wanted to do ever since he was a medical student,” says Jonathan Bennett, vice president of the New York Committee on Occupational Safety and Health. “That listening, he says, is the most important part of a doctor’s job. “To me it meant going outside the examining room,” explains Markowitz. “Dealing with worlds in which physicians don’t normally feel comfortable.”

But prevention cannot be accomplished just by working in an office. “To do my work,” he says, “I have to move to the workers.”

For Markowitz, whose offices have ranged from the urban chaos around Ground Zero to quiet rural Tennessee. For several years he has directed a major health-screening program for current and former employees at Union Carbide in Ken- tucky, Ohio and Tennessee that produce nuclear material for the Department of Energy. In cooperation with the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical & Energy Workers International Union (PACE), which represents workers at these sites, Markowitz’s team has screened over 8,000 workers for chronic lung disease, kidney and liver disease and hearing loss. It is the largest occupational health testing program in the country.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS

“...the workers were worried.”

Though details are classified, some of the plants’ output was reportedly used in nuclear weapons. Considering the scale of possible health risks in these jobs, the workers had received relatively little medical attention before the screening project was started. “I think there was a lot of awareness about radiation,” says Markowitz. “It’s the kind of information both residents and policymakers need. Right now they just trust company doctors. “This is not a service delivered by outside professionals, but a true collaboration in which the union is front and involved in every aspect of the project,” Markowitz says. “In communities, unions are the face of the project. We have rank-and-file workers in plants doing education workshops.”

This community aspect of health care is a central part of Markowitz’s latest effort, a pollution testing project in New York City neighborhoods that have high asthma rates. Markowitz and his team have set up a “mobile-air lab” that will measure air pollutants at street level.

For years, advocates in East Harlem and the South Bronx have argued that heavy traffic from large trucks and bus depots as well as factories is a major reason why local asthma rates are among the highest in the country. But studies have not conclusively tied asthma rates to pollution or any other particular factor. Markowitz thinks better data may help provide the answer.

“If you look at air pollution data, monitors are generally placed on other end, in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx; [a] neighborhood school is within 300 feet. “You really can’t find where trucks produce pollution or any other particular factor.”

That listening, he says, is the most important part of a doctor’s job.

The doctor is in – the streets

By TOMIO GERON

Dr. Steven Markowitz examines a day laborer who did cleanup work near the WTC site.
TIME OF CRISIS

Wars in our future

By MICHAEL FABRICANT

This is a watershed moment. The headlines convey the knotted lash of profound threat — yet this moment is also bursting with possibility. The divide is as thin as our capacity to transcend denial and draw upon very finite resources to resist.

The expansive shadow of anti-democratic forces is chilling public discourse and decision-making. The political choices of the Bush administration, unquestioned by a compliant media, are eroding the most basic assumptions about what it means to be an American. Preemptive attack is presented as the new basis of U.S. foreign policy; Bush advisors intimate that after Iraq, countries such as Syria, Iran and North Korea are next. This regulatory nuclear-clear weapons is discussed as a viable and potentially necessary option.

Civil liberties are quietly but dramatically rolled back and the new “Patriot Laws” used as a weapon against dissent. A common theme is the elimination of any check on executive authority: airplane ticket-holding “no-fly” lists, non-citizens targeted for deportation, and citizens declared “enemy combatants” are all told that they have no right of appeal.

TAX CUTS

Tax cuts are proposed that nakedly benefit only the wealthy and promise a ballooning deficit. Hundreds of billions are available for war while we are told there is “no money” for education or health care. Congressional leaders welcome deficits as a tool to further cut spending on human needs.

The FCC is moving to further deregulate media ownership. This regulatory monopoly in many radio markets. Now Clear Channel is sponsoring pro-war “Radio America” in cities across the country, a foreshadowing of what further deregulation will mean for our political discourse.

The list of what is at stake in this intensifying grab for power by the far right and the economic interests it represents can seem endless. It certainly threatens the democratic horizons of American citizenship.

The ostrich in each of us wants to deny the seriousness of the moment. This too shall pass. We’ll just wait it out or take a few cautious steps to register dissent. If we are patient, they will run out of steam. These are but a few of the many refrains that litter our critical judgment, offer cover and provide a basis for normalcy. But can normalcy be imposed on a political moment that propagates fear and uses it as a battering ram for anti-democratic and empire-building policies? I suspect not.

American foreign and domestic policy are at a crossroads. As the only remaining superpower, America has to choose a future in relationship to both her own citizens and the rest of the world.

The road we are on today leads to an unending war against both the rest of the world and those Americans who are struggling to make ends meet. This may benefit a small fraction of American citizens in the short term. However, the drive for international domination will produce various forms of “blowback,” as it has in the past, and this will touch us all. The drive to yoke the rest of the world to American economic interests can only be enforced through an expansive and active military force and various forms of occupation.

At home, this will create intensifying social and class divisions that may become less and less tenable over time. The domestic cleavage and its potential aftershock will also accelerate the rush to a security state that polices citizen behavior and narrows the space for social dissent. These pieces, when assembled, will have the acrid odor of neo-fascism.

NOT INEVITABLE

None of this, however, is inevitable. Another road beckons, if we can see ourselves in reciprocal relationships nationally and internationally. We simply can not go it alone. This other road demands a greater emphasis on diplomacy without the threat of warfare; a reinvigorated commitment to dissent and civil liberties; and redistributive economic investments at home and abroad. This road offers less of the illusory assurance of guaranteed outcomes that military intervention and exclusive reliance on market forces claim to provide. It demands a basic commitment to solving human problems with the resources, patience and conversation that we often dedicate to those whom we define as family or community. We make such commitments in our private lives because we understand that this investment of caring and attention is most likely to succeed. There is, of course, no guarantee. But we have no chance of success without a willingness to invest part of ourselves in a common fate with others. We need to take these lessons of private life and apply them to the public sphere.

First, however, we will need to create more elastic and open definitions of community. We will need to take risks for people we have never met. For that to occur, each of us will need to consider what is at stake if we continue to embrace the illusion that we can protect our private lives without reconfiguring our relationship to the public.

CROSSROADS

Because we are at a crossroads, we need to actively resist the onslaught of policies that hurt so many people struggling to make ends meet. Little can be won if we do not contest present policy. The courage to shed incapacitating denial and face the present threat, to visibly register dissent and risk some part of ourselves, has never been more necessary.

Unending warfare would likely destroy the very democratic institutions most of us wish to protect, and that most of us count on for a “normal” private life. Thus, developing road maps that connect our private lives to a public sphere is critical.

Challenging American imperial prerogatives at home and abroad through the emerging peace and justice movement is essential if our legacy is to be anything more than the ash of democratic edifice.

This will require surrendering time, resources, position and sometimes our comfort or security because that is what it will take for us to win.

This is a moment of both great possibility and danger. Nothing is inevitable. To shift direction, for ourselves and our children, we must act now before it is too late.

Michael Fabricant is a professor at Hunter College and executive officer of the Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare at the CUNY Graduate Center, and a PSC Vice President for Senior Colleges.

The ostrich in each of us would rather not think about it.

POETRY

One by Billy Collins

Tomes

There is a section in my library for death and another for Irish history, a few shelves for the poetry of China and Japan, and in the center a row of reference books, solid and imperturbable, the ones you can turn to anytime, when the night is going wrong or when the day is full of empty promise.

I have nothing against the thin monograph, the odd query, a note on the identity of Chekhov’s dentist — but what I prefer on days like these is to get up from the couch, pull down The History of the World, and hold in my hands a book containing almost everything and weighing no more than a sack of potatoes, 11 pounds, I discovered one day when I placed it on the black iron scale.

My mother used to keep in her kitchen, the device on which she would place a certain amount of flour, a certain amount of fish.

Open flat on my lap under a halo of lamplight, a book like this always has a way of soothing the nerves, quieting the riotous surf of information that foams around my waist even though it never mentions the silent labors of the poor, the daydreams of grocers and tailors, or the faces of men and women alone in single rooms — even though it never mentions my mother, who only last year rolled off the edge of the earth in her electric bed, in her smooth pink nightgown, the bones of her fingers interlocked, her sunken eyes staring upward beyond all knowledge, beyond the tiny figures of history, some in uniform, some not, marching onto the pages of this incredibly heavy book.

Billy Collins is a Distinguished Professor of English at Lehman College and is serving as United States Poet Laureate for 2001-2003. The poem above was previous-ly published in Sailing Alone Around the Room (Random House, 2001). Collins’s latest collection is Nine Verses (Random House, 2002).
With nine classes to teach per year, it would seem almost impossible for community college faculty at CUNY to do serious research. Yet they do— and the variety and scope of their work is unique among community colleges nationwide.

Community colleges (CCs) are often defined as local institutions. The importance of their links to the surrounding community is reflected in the very name. Yet a large proportion of scholarship at CUNY's two-year institutions is international in scope.

A Hindu religious center in India, a Buddhist institution in Taiwan, and researchers at a Catholic college in upstate New York are working with BMCC psychologist Ting Lei to compare the process of spiritual transformation in different religions and cultures. “We will compare those who have just entered religious training with those who have been devoted for years, to see if they follow the same sequence,” Lei explains. In past work, Lei has compared student motivation and achievement in the US and Taiwan.

AVANT GARDE

When Tony Pipolo of Queensborough CC was invited to Russia to do a seminar on American avant garde film, he was in some ways completing a circle. An editor of Millennium Film Journal, which focuses on experimental cinema, Pipolo discussed and presented films by several post-WWII American directors—Kenneth Anger, Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage—who themselves had been influenced by avant garde films made in Russia a generation earlier. “They looked back to all kinds of things developed by Eisenstein and other early Soviet directors in the 1920s,” Pipolo says. “Especially the idea of montage—not just telling a story in a conventional way, but using shots and juxtapositions in a way that provokes a certain reaction in the viewer.” However, these Soviet cinema pioneers—Dovzhenko, Vertov and others—had been out of favor for so long that students at the Moscow Film School, the oldest in the world, were largely unfamiliar with their work.

The American films Pipolo presented were even less familiar, but students responded to the power of the work. After he showed three short films by Maya Deren, he recalls, “this woman in the front row was weeping, audibly weeping.”

Some CC research is profoundly international and at the same time profoundly local—for example, a recent study of English and Spanish usage in the Dominican community in Washington Heights, by Sue Dicker and Mahmoud Hafiz of Hostos Community College. “There’s a common perception among English-speakers that Spanish-speakers [in the US] resist learning English,” says Dicker, author of Languages in America: A Pluralist View. “The evidence shows just the opposite.” Among Latino immigrant families, says Dicker, “the switch from Spanish to English usually takes place within one generation.”

Connections between teaching and research flow in both directions.

Part I: The shape of things

Sue Dicker of Hostos does linguistic research in Washington Heights.

To do research in the sciences you need a grant of at least $100,000 or $200,000,” he says, and the grad students and lack of facilities at the CCs make such work even harder. “It’s only with tremendous motivation and commitment on the part of certain faculty members that it’s possible at all,” Davis says. Many work with labs at CUNY senior college campuses or private medical schools.

Most scientific research projects at a CUNY CC focus on student training and development. “Teaching is more central to the mission of a community college,” Davis says. “That’s what’s beautiful about CCs: faculty who are completely devoted to teaching and their students, but still committed to maintaining research activity. What some of us at a four-year college may view as a weakness, or something less than what they are doing, I view as just the opposite.”

In 1986, when Clara Wu first asked students in her chemistry class at LaGuardia if they’d like to do some research, Wu recalls, “I only expected about six students, out of 48, to volunteer. Thirty raised their hands. I said, ‘Wow, what happened?’ They told me, ‘We never had this kind of opportunity before.’” Today Wu directs the National Institutes of Health “Bridges to the Future” program at LaGuardia, which recruits 24 students to conduct research each year.

For more information on this or a similar program at BCC, Davis notes that many CC students are the first in their families ever to attend college. “They might not have dreamed of becoming scientists until they saw a flyer for the program on campus,” he says. A focus on teaching is something that CUNY community colleges have in common with CCs across the country. But being part of a research university makes CUNY CCs different from most, even unique, in their closer integration of teaching with research.

This is not simply a result of University-wide standards for tenure and promotion (though those standards are very much on the minds of new CC faculty as they struggle with the teaching load). Research is what CUNY community college faculty have trained for: 65% of full-time faculty at Queensborough, for example, have PhDs, compared with 38% at public community colleges nationwide. CUNY CC faculty do research both to satisfy their own scholarly curiosity and because it enriches what they bring into the classroom.

Both ways

The link between teaching and research flows both ways. Tricia Lin’s classes at BMCC not only helped change the direction of her research—she now overhauls her scholarship to challenge her students.

In a recent English literature class, Lin used a Samoan novel that she describes as “a young woman talking back to Margaret Mead.” The students found its pidgin English difficult, and they let her know it. “The first week they complained that it was impossible,” she says. “The second week it got better. By the third week they were loving it, and at the end they all said I should definitely use that book again.” Lin says this in a phone interview, but you can hear the smile in her voice as she remembers. “To teach what I study,” she says, “it’s very inspiring.”

Next: Grappling with the obstacles