EOC workers reach deal

The proposed settlement for the Educational Opportunity Centers maintains parity with the rest of CUNY and blocks efforts to downgrade the EOCs.

New York City labor turned out in force to support the Transit Workers Union – and to say ‘No’ to balancing the City’s budget on our backs. The PSC helped to organize a December 16 rally at City Hall, in support of both public workers and public services. PSC President Barbara Bowen told the crowd, “When we fight alongside TWU we are fighting for all the people who produce this city – by moving it, cleaning it, teaching it, protecting it.”

Profs nixed for political views

The Bush administration is grilling scientists about their political views – and barring them from peer-review committees if they give the wrong answers.

UAPC workers vote ‘Union Yes’

Despite an intense anti-union campaign, 85% of workers at the University Applications Processing Center voted to unionize with the PSC.

YOUR RIGHTS

Research time, HEO gains

Second in a series on the new contract.

PUBLIC TRANSIT, PUBLIC EDUCATION
STANDING TOGETHER
The Welfare Fund
Note: The Welfare Fund Trustees’ recent decisions are in fact along the lines that you recommend. See article, page 8.

A threat to health – & safety

The official word is out at CUNY. CLTs who retire are not being re-placed.

We need your support now more than ever to demand that full-time CLTs be hired as replacements for CLT retirees. Whatever affects CLTs now will affect all instructional staff later.

The age of the contingent workforce has come...unless we all fight it.

– Ellen P. Steinberg
Vice-Chair, CLT Chapter

Don’t lower drug cap

I am writing in response to your Clarion article regarding health ben-efits, particularly prescription drug coverage. My wife and I both found your discussion of the necessity for change and the various changes in drug benefits helpful and open.

Although I am retired, I don’t claim to speak for all retirees. Nev-ertheless, I believe my concerns closely represent those of most re-tired CUNY employees.

Drug coverage is increasingly necessary as we get older. The drugs we must take don’t just improve the quality of our lives; they often keep us alive! We urge the PSC to consider the real effects of some of its proposed plans to contain drug costs. It is important for younger PSC mem-bers to appreciate what it is like to be on a fixed, unchanged income.

We agree with restrictions that place responsibility on us to fill pre-scripts most inexpensively. Lowering the cap on benefits, however, is a truly frightening prospect. We all need our benefits—and we need them to stay unchanged.

– Lawrence V. Castiglione
Queens College (emeritus)

Editor’s note: The Welfare Fund Trustees’ recent decisions are in fact along the lines that you recommend. See article, page 8.

No to parity for adjuncts

The leadership of the PSC has proposed a new policy, parity for ad-juncts, that it has incorporated into its contract demands. The CUNY Association of Scholars, a labor organization of the National Association of Schol-ars, has written a report, “Parity for Adjuncts: The New Threat to Acad-emic Standards,” that opposes this new policy.

Full-time faculty are recruited on the basis of a national search, and they have research and administra-tive responsibilities, whereas the part-time faculty have neither. We do not object to improvements in the wages and working conditions of the part-time faculty but, rather than parity for wages and job security for the part-time faculty, the Association recommends that the PSC devote its energies to increasing the number of full-time fac-ulity as a way of improving the teaching and research mission of the University.

What then should be the role of the part-time faculty? The Associa-tion has proactively recommended the following: “The Role of Adjuncts at CUNY,” that recommends that the role of part-time faculty should be limited to providing flexibility in response to enrollment fluctuations and providing coverage in special circum-stances when full-time faculty are temporarily unavailable.

The full texts of these reports are available on the Association’s Web page: www.nas.org/affiliates/cuny.org.

– Charles Landesman (emeritus)
Hunter College

PSC President Barbara Bowen re-sponds: The PSC is hardly unique in advocating parity for adjuncts; par-ty is the goal of our parent union, the AFT, and of many other unions in higher education. The PSC ex-poses equal pay for equal work and has developed careful proposals that calibrate pro rata pay for adjuncts to full-time lecturers. Working for decent conditions for adjuncts is not contradictory with unity for all full-time faculty, which has been one of the PSC’s main campaigns. In fact, it will help us to achieve that goal—and it’s al-so the right thing to do.

Berlusconi and history

The article “CUNY and Berlus-coni – Honor Our Values,” by Marta Petruceanu, is right on target. The December 11 NY Times reports that chancellor from at least 50 Italian universities resisted to protest spending cuts for higher education in Berlusconi’s 2003 budget, saying that there were not enough funds for universities to survive. Mario Santamaria, spokesperson for the Italian chancellors, stated that they would not even pay professors’ salaries.

Berlusconi’s hostility to universi-ties should be no surprise. His coal-ition includes the National Alliance, a party trying to revive Mussolini’s fascism.

Will history repeat itself? On October 9, 1934, two thousand stu-dents jammed into City College’s Great Hall to hear College President Robinson call them “gutter-snipes.” When a representative of the CCNY Student Council spoke, he began with a “message to the enslaved, tricked Italian students, la-boring under Fascism.” The head of the Romance Languages Depart-ment attempted to drag him away from the microphone and the meet-ing broke up. (City College Microscope, 1938)

We all should hope that Chancel-lor Goldstein will scrupulously avoid receiving the message, “Your role is nil,” that Berlusconi communicated in his December 30 address to the Chamber of Deputies. It would be part of Pataki’s response to a projected $10 billion State budget gap when he releases his budget proposal on January 29. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver has come out against a tuition hike. Organiz-ers of the December 11 protest and the recent Pataki protests have already begun; the PSC’s Solidarity Committee is meeting on February 10. (See Calendar, p. 8)

Students failed for light course load

Six Middle Eastern students in Col-orado were jailed in December by the Immigration and Naturaliza-tion Service (INS) for failing to take enough classes. The students, who are not suspected of any other of-fense, were jailed because they are considered illegal aliens. Despite passage of a 1986 law, the INS requires that students receive permission from the university, which at least one of the detained students did receive, according to the Denver Post. The student was one hour shy of a full load after receiving approval to drop a course. The arrests have in-duced campuses nationwide to submit information to the INS on new foreign students by January 30 and on currently enrolled stu-dents by August 1 for a new online INS tracking system.

Illinois TAs win union in a landslide

Teaching assistants at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign won a landslide vote to form the first such union in the state in De-cember. Graduate students select-ed the Graduate Employees Orga-nization, affiliated with the AFT, with a 1,180 to 347 vote. The union will represent 2,780 students, in-cluding most of the teaching assis-tants and about half of the gradu-ate assistants. The eight-year fight for union representation gained momentum last spring after a student sit-in at the university’s administration building forced administrators to meet with union leaders for the first time.
EOC contract reached

By TOMIO GERON

After more than two years, faculty and staff at the CUNY Educational Opportunity Centers have a contract settlement.

The PSC negotiating team and CUNY management reached an agreement in January that maintains parity between EOC titles and those in the rest of CUNY. The union turned back management efforts to downgrade the EOCs by creating new lower-paid positions and salary steps.

“I’m ticked,” said Amy Nicholas, Manhattan EOC chapter chair and a member of the PSC negotiating team. “I think the team did a wonderful job.”

The settlement provides a 4% salary increase in the first year of the contract and at least 3% in the second year, with higher raises for lower-paid workers.

Like the broader CUNY contract, the agreement covering EOC titles provides new support for professional development, here in the form of $500 per year for each learning or vocational training alone, without providing the option of a path to college. “It would have led to less qualified instructors and less quality instruction,” said Jackie Corcoran, Bronx EOC chapter chair. “And if it would have devalued our students, the people we serve, in terms of offering the best education at the EOCs.” Management had also demanded to add new, lower steps on the adjunct pay scale, which would have had a similar effect.

The four EOCs – in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens – offer learning environments for many students whom the rest of CUNY may not be able to reach, providing a range of educational programs that help individuals make the transition into college or jobs.

Management also wanted an increase in faculty teaching load with no increase in pay. “I was particularly glad about preventing a 20 percent increase in workload above what everyone else got without pay,” said Nicholas.

Under the new agreement, EOC lecturers and EOC doctoral lecturers can be assigned one additional contact teaching hour per trimester within their regular work hours; they will thus have one hour less of non-teaching work.

Other non-economic aspects of the settlement include retiree library access and formation of a labor-management committee to develop proposals on professional enhancement, through sabbaticals and access to promotions.

Gene Plunkett, Manhattan EOC chapter chair, was the one member of the bargaining team to vote against the agreement. “The overall contract is very good, except for one piece: the workload,” Plunkett said. “I did the hours for the teachers would be excessive. The team did their best, but I felt I had to vote no.”

“I feel good about recommending the agreement,” responded Nicholas. “The increase of one instructional hour does not increase the established workload,” she noted. At her center this is 30 hours, half of which have been contact hours. “No contract is perfect,” Nicholas said, “but this is a very good document.”

VOTING

The final agreement will be voted on by the PSC Delegate Assembly in late January. If approved, EOC members will vote by mail in February.

While the EOCs’ agreement was bargained separately, it has the same effective dates as the contract covering the rest of CUNY – 10/31/02, and so will have already expired by the time the ratification vote is conducted. However, the PSC has received a commitment from CUNY that during the next round of bargaining, the terms covering EOC titles will be negotiated with the rest of the PSC’s CUNY unit.

HEOs on the move

By CLARION STAFF

Over 85 Higher Education Officers (HEOs) at Queens College attended a special meeting in November with College President James Muyskens.

The result was not only an open and frank discussion, but some progress on key HEO concerns. HEOs at CUNY work in many different areas – in admissions, bursars’ and registrars’ offices, financial aid, counseling, information technology and security, to name a few – and they have as many different kinds of frustrations. At the November 12 meeting, they laid it on the line.

PROMOTION

“When I was hired I was misadvised about the nature of the HEO title and told there would be opportunities for promotion,” said one HEO who has worked at Queens for over 20 years. “I’ve put in vast amounts of overtime. I’ve worked hard knowing that if I did not do it, it would not get done. Did I ever get a ‘thank you’ or any recognition of my efforts? Never!”

The lack of a clear path for promotion is one of HEOs’ biggest problems on the job – but the new PSC-CUNY contract allows HEOs to nominate themselves directly for referral to the promotion process, instead of depending on their supervisors to do so (see p. 7).

In the November meeting, John Troyanisky, director of the QC Testing Center read from a HEO petition that asked President Muyskens to take the following steps:

The November meeting, John Troyanisky, director of the QC Testing Center read from a HEO petition that asked President Muyskens to take the following steps:

■ Reconstruct the HEO Screening Committee with new members and institute a three-year term limit.
■ Ensure that at least three members are currently working HEOs at Queens College.
■ Publicize the membership of the HEO Screening Committee, its meeting schedule and its actions.
■ Establish and publish the criteria for, and process by which, HEOs can request reclassification and ensure that these requests are acted on in a timely manner.

EQUITY AND FAIRNESS

Muyskens promised to consider the HEO proposals, as well as their recommendations for who should serve. “The underlying aim of the HEO requests concerns matters of equity and fairness,” he said. “These are core principles of the academy.”

The president noted that QC HEOs were clearly “very demoralized,” and pledged to act as quickly as possible to change this. “The transparenopy issue is an example of something that I can address immediately,” Muyskens said.

In a follow-up meeting, Muyskens agreed to promptly appoint his representatives to the newly established HEO labor-management committee (see p. 7). The November open meeting was a first for QC HEOs in many ways: in its size, in the level of attention from College administration, and in HEOs’ ability to speak out with a clear, united voice. “Key to our success was a high level of organizing by our campus HEO working group and President Muyskens’ inclusive leadership style, which encouraged free discussion,” said Iris DeLutro, PSC Vice President for Cross-Campus Units. “Most important was HEOs’ renewed trust in their union, built by painstaking, patient work among HEO sisters and brothers.”

The session was joined by Jonathan Buchsbaum, chair of the PSC’s QC chapter, who has invited HEO representatives to sit in on the faculty unit chapter Executive Committee, labor management and general chapter meetings. “We do not only support HEO concerns, but HEOs have enriched our chapter discussions,” Buchsbaum told Clarion. “HEOs are indispensable to campus life.”

“HEOs did not come to this moment easily,” said Miriam Thompson of the QC Labor Resource Center. “We developed a core leadership who were savvy, united, persisted and won some tangible victories around HEO reclassification.”

Thompson urged HEOs across CUNY to get active on their campuses. “Together,” she said, “we can make a difference.”

NEWS

EOC Chapter Chairs worked in the team that weighed the agreement: (from left) Amy Nicholas (Brooklyn EOC); Gene Plunkett (Manhattan EOC); Jackie Corcoran (Bronx EOC). The Queens EOC will elect its chapter chair this spring.
TWU gains in contract deal

By CLARION STAFF

On December 16, Transport Workers Union Local 100 signed a contract settlement with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, averting a possible transit strike. The agreement, which was not yet ratified at press time, provides for a 6% pay raise over three years, a $1800 lump-sum payment, a large increase in funding for medical benefits and other gains.

Negotiations between the TWU and the MTA began months before the old contract was due to expire on December 15, but management avoided serious discussions until Governor George Pataki, who controls the MTA board, won reelection in November. The agency then announced that it had a massive deficit, which would require austere labor contracts and probably a fare hike, too. With TWU leaders insisting on a substantial pay increase and other advances, a strike seemed a real possibility.

MIDNIGHT NEWS

While the MTA and the New York City government got court injunctions against a walkout, government agencies and employers prepared for a strike. However, just before midnight on December 15, Local 100 announced that its members would remain at their jobs while negotiations continued, as significant progress had been made.

The next day thousands of unionists, including a large PSC contingent, joined a march across the Brooklyn Bridge and rallied at City Hall in support of the TWU (see sidebar). Just hours after the rally, the MTA and TWU announced a settlement.

Under the agreement, workers would see an average of just over 8% in salary increases, including a $1000 lump-sum payment, a large increase in funding for medical benefits and other gains. The PSC and unions from across the city marched in support of TWU Local 100 on December 16. At center is UFT President Randi Weingarten. (with modest increases in co-payments, and domestic partners now covered), taking over their provision from a severely underfunded health benefit trust. This move is expected to cost the agency hundreds of millions of dollars.

The MTA agreed to contribute $2.4 million to a child care fund and to establish a prescription drug plan for retirees too young to receive existing coverage, which does not kick in until they become eligible for Medicare.

MTA disciplinary procedures – described by the New York Times as resembling a “police state” – will be modified in several ways. These include paying workers for time spent at hearings if they are found innocent of charges, providing rapid hearings when workers are suspended from their jobs, exempting most workers from the requirement that they report by phone every time they leave the house while on sick leave, and allowing minor disciplinary charges to be resolved through informal procedures.

Safety procedures also will be modified, with the union winning the right to bring its own safety experts onto work sites and to receive safety-related reports. The MTA also agreed to penalize managers and supervisors who fail to correct legitimate safety problems identified by affected workers.

MTA DEMANDS

While most changes in the proposed contract were in response to union demands, the TWU did agree to drop a no-layoff provision in the expired contract and to permit the MTA to merge its two New York City bus subsidiaries, which the union previously had resisted, wanting first to resolve work rule and other issues associated with any restructuring.

Local 100’s Executive Board approved the settlement by a vote of 31-9, and a mail vote on ratification was in progress as Clarion went to press. Critics of the pact focused on the lump sum, the bus merger and loss of the no-layoff clause (though there was debate over how much protection the original language had offered).

Past transit contracts have not directly established a pattern for other municipal agreements, but they have influenced them. Other public employers no doubt will try to use the lack of a pay increase in the first year of the TWU pact as a precedent, while unions may use the overall size of the settlement – substantial given City and State fiscal crises – as a starting point for their demands. However, many provisions in the TWU pact deal with situations unique to transit, such as the massive cost of restructuring the health benefit plan and the MTA’s autocratic disciplinary regime.

“More than for its specific terms,” said PSC Executive Director Deborah Bell, “the TWU contract is important for demonstrating that protection of union, with strong allies, can make significant monetary and non-monetary advances, even in the face of economic stringency.”

The resolution also calls for monitoring and reporting on access and success for ESL, SEEK and other disadvantaged students; transfer rates between community and senior colleges; and support programs such as Summer Immersion and Prelude to Success.

But monitoring of CUNY admissions will not be effective without outside pressure, says PSC Secretary Cecilia McCaill. “I don’t think anything will happen with monitoring unless we make it happen.”

The PSC has asked the New York City Council for help in obtaining data from CUNY about admissions. The union is also urging NYSUT to make remediation a top priority in its dealings with the State Department of Education and Board of Regents.

Despite the unanimous vote, there was some concern among Regents about the new policy. At the urging of Regent Joseph Bowman, Jr., the Regents’ resolution did not approve the remediation policy permanently, as originally proposed, but only through the end of the current CUNY Master Plan in 2004. Regent Arnold Gardner tried unsuccessfully to postpone the vote, arguing that some Regents felt rushed.

The week before the vote, PSC Executive Council members Mike Fabricant, Anne Friedman and Cecilia McCaill, with Neil Foley of NYSUT, lobbied Saul Cohen, chair of the Regents’ higher ed committee.

The State Board of Regents unani-
mously voted on December 12 to allow CUNY to continue its contro-
versial ban on remedial classes in B.A. programs.

First added by the CUNY Board of Trustees in 1989 over opposition from students, faculty and staff, the ban also changed admissions poli-
cies. After more than a decade of adminis-
trations requirements for B.A. pro-
grams, students must now pass three
tests before they can enroll.

NYS Regents’ approval is required for such policy changes by CUNY.
**UAPC workers vote for union**

By TOMIO GERON

Workers at the University Applications Processing Center (UAPC) have voted 77 to 14 to join the PSC, becoming the first new unit organized by the PSC in almost 30 years.

Shouting, laughter and hugs broke out among UAPC workers attending the December 4 vote count, after the overwhelming margin was announced. “I’m gratified and very pleased,’ said Larry Maslansky, who has worked at the UAPC for 18 years. “It was long overdue.” Most workers gave two reasons why they voted for unionization: they want both raises and respect.

**SCARE TACTICS**

The lopsided vote came despite an intense anti-union campaign organized by UAPC management and the CUNY Research Foundation (RF), which oversees the UAPC. “Management” was definitely trying to scare people into voting no but it worked only for a handful of organizers by UAPC management and the RF, which oversees the UAPC.

UAPC managers managed workers attend “captive audience” meetings to listen to anti-union lectures, which were then followed up with one-on-one sessions to pressure workers to vote no. When PSC members wore T-shirts that read “Union Yes!” they were ordered not to wear the shirts or even talk about the union. After union lawyers challenged both edicts as violations of federal labor law, management backed down.

In a daily series of flyers, management attacked the PSC as unconcerned about its members’ inclusion of a reprint of a hostile op-ed including a reprint of a hostile op-ed. PSC records had been kept.

Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott to visit the schools to see what the impact of the cuts would be. In the end all cuts were reversed except for $125,000 for administration — and Hunter College has said it will make up the difference.

**TEACHER TRAINING**

The link between Hunter College and the Campus Schools grows out of the College’s origin as a teacher training school for women 130 years ago, with the elementary school founded as part of its teacher training program.

Today Hunter College Elementary School (HCES) has about 360 students, while a few work in a teaching assistant's bursars and planning a parent/teacher rally, the jobs were saved. Both the elementary and high school PTAs worked closely with the union chapter to make their case to City Hall, getting in an overcrowded building that causes problems for those who work and study within. “It’s a pretty beat-up building that’s not large enough for both schools,” said Glenn Kissack, a member of the PSC chapter’s executive committee. “It was never intended to have that many students,” added Chapter Chair David Towber.

Science teacher Helen Brand noted that the building has few windows and suffers from bad air circulation. “We have high carbon dioxide levels,” she said. “People complain that they’re tired or headache-y.” After meetings between union representatives and management, a major renovation of the ventilation system was planned for last summer, said Towber. But the project has been delayed, and the union is still pressing for improvements.

The schools’ relationship with the rest of CUNY can be a sore point. For example, in November their access to the Hunter College online library system was shut off, including access to the Lexis-Nexis database. Brand told Clarion that the sudden cutoff was unfair and caused problems for students’ science projects.

Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott was dubbed a “union-busting” director of organizing. Carlese, PSC associate executive director and director of organizing. “We intend to make sure that other RF workers have this same opportunity to achieve equity with CUNY employees.”

85% cast ballots for PSC

UAPC staff applaud the announcement of voting results on December 4.

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Hunter Schools on the map

By TOMIO GERON

CUNY students tend to be older, on average, than college students elsewhere. But some students in the CUNY system believe parents and in fact, some of them are still in kindergarten.

While many people at CUNY don’t know (or sometimes forget) about the elementary school and high school associated with Hunter College, the schools moved into the spotlight in last fall’s budget fight.

In November Mayor Michael Bloomberg proposed a midyear budget cut of $183,000 for the two Hunter Campus Schools (HCS), which would have meant layoffs for about 10% of the faculty.

“We learned about it in the newspapers,” said music teacher Michael Stratechuk, vice chair of the Hunter Campus Schools’ PSC chapter. “Faculty here were shocked. We met, we made phone calls, we talked with parents.”

After a flurry of lobbying City Council members, meeting with Hunter College administrators and planning a parent/teacher rally, the jobs were saved. Both the elementary and high school PTAs worked closely with the union chapter to make their case to City Hall, getting

Hunter Campus Schools students and faculty rallied against budget cuts.

“Either we’re part of CUNY and Hunter College or we’re not.”

RAAB REVIEW

Some PSC members said they were glad to see Hunter College President Jennifer Raab — herself an HCCHS graduate — appoint a liaison to the Campus Schools, and that Raab had been supportive in the fight against midyear budget cuts. On the other hand, there has been some friction over a Raab-initiated Strategic Planning Initiative on the schools’ future, which produced an initial report that was widely panned by HCS faculty.

One issue currently under discussion is the composition of the student body. “Right now I don’t think it’s living up to our mission, in terms of having more diversity,” said Kissack. “Of course, this is controversial.” Towber said that the school is unified on the need for more diversity, but “I think we’re very much divided on how to achieve it.” For the high school, Towber argued that the problem was not in the initial admissions process but rather in subsequent retention.

Looking over all these issues is the question of next year’s budget. “We’re very happy with the result last fall, but I’m concerned that people not get lethargic,” Towber said. “Down the road there are going to be more cuts,” he said — and the PSC chapter is already planning meetings to get ready.
How's your workload?

Our Roving Reporter asks around

BILL GARGAN
Professor, Library Department
Brooklyn College

When I was hired in 1979, we had 27 people. Next Fall we’ll have 17 at most. Students are not getting the kind of services that they should.

On the reference desk, where before you might have had half an hour to deal with a complex problem, now you spend five minutes here, you run to spend ten minutes there, then you have to run upstairs to deal with a security problem. It’s a speedup issue.

I think the thing that suffers the most is collection development. They’re going to discover 25 years from now that there’s a lot of vital material they don’t have.

Librarians should be included in the research time for new faculty. Most librarians use our vacation to the research time for new faculty. Material they don’t have.

VERA WEEKES
HEO Associate, Caribbean Research Center
Mega Evers College

Our teaching load was raised unilaterally in the budget cuts of the 1970s. Now it’s 27 hours in the community colleges. It used to be 24 hours, but at one point the University had declared even that to be excessive and said it should be reduced. In 1986 the University set a goal of 18 hours, as a level consistent with recommendations by professional societies. So we need to think of restoring the teaching load to what it was, or what CUNY was moving towards.

It’s not just teaching, our workload has increased in many ways. In counseling, tutoring and advising, the number of support staff is down while the number of students has gone up. And as the number of full-time faculty has decreased, those remaining have had to take on a greater load of committee work.

For many, many years, I used to come in at 7:30, 8:00 and leave at 7 or 8 at night. I’d come in on Saturday and even Sunday, depending on the need. For me personally, because I work at the Center, it’s been about serving the community. But a lot of folks, especially those in departments that serve a lot of students, they have to do very difficult hours for registration and so on and they’re not compensated for it. If they were, in either time or money, there would be less chance of abuse.

Too often, HEOs are taken for granted. It’s a 35-hour week, but you need 45 hours to get the job done and that’s what most people do.

Your workload can change. And you may have more responsibility, but you don’t get compensation until you get reclassified. These new committees should help with that.

PHIL PECORINO
Professor, Social Sciences Department
Queensborough CC

I think the thing that suffers the most that enrages me. The survey is a great tool for gaining a nuanced understanding of members’ thinking on the issues until you have to write about it. We tell students that every day. But if we don’t have time to write about a subject, how can we teach it with any depth of understanding?

What really gets me is that the administration is in effect telling students, “You don’t deserve the best education.” I can’t tell you how much that enrages me.

COREY ROBIN
Assistant Professor, Political Science Department
Brooklyn College

I think there’s an attitude on part of administration at CUNY that sees our job solely in terms of the hours we spend in the classroom. For me, so much of the work that I do is outside of the classroom, and that work is absolutely crucial to what I bring to my students. Every bit of research that I do enriches my teaching.

I find it criminal that there’s not more of a real, not just verbal, commitment to giving professors the time to develop their thinking on the questions that they’re teaching.

I tell my students, you don’t really know what you think about something until you have to write about it. We tell students that every day. But if we don’t have time to write about a subject, how can we teach it with any depth of understanding?

What really gets me is that the administration is in effect telling students, “You don’t deserve the best education.” I can’t tell you how much that enrages me.

JOYCE SOLOMON MOORMAN
Adjunct Associate Professor, Humanities Department
LaGuardia & City Tech

The paid office hour [for adjuncts] needs to be expanded. To get it you have to teach six credits at one college. Adjuncts who teach six credits CUNY-wide, but at two different schools, do not get any paid office hour – and they need it.

Personally, I feel there should be an office hour for every class. Because you always have to communicate with students. For some classes, there should be more than one hour, particularly in courses with a lot of papers to read and grade. To be effective you really have to sit down and go over a paper with the student.

Of course, the basic problem is that we’re not paid enough per course. Most adjuncts do the job because they love teaching, and they’re trying to figure out a way to teach and make a living wage.

Bargaining the next CUNY-wide contract

Union asks to start with intellectual property

The PSC notified CUNY on September 25 that the union was ready to begin negotiations for the successor agreement to the current contract, starting with the issue of intellectual property. “Since CUNY announced it was about to adopt a new intellectual property policy, and we believe this policy touches many mandatory areas of bargaining, we requested that bargaining begin immediately on this issue,” said PSC First Vice President Steve London.

CUNY refused to open negotiations on this subject, maintaining that they have the right to unilaterally adopt a new intellectual property policy. The PSC has filed an improper practice charge against CUNY at the Public Employment Relations Board for what it believes to be a violation of the Taylor Law.

Terms of the current contract, which expired on October 31, 2002, continue under NY State law.

MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Meanwhile the union has been building the rest of its agenda. A membership survey has drawn a strong response, and the results are undergoing a detailed analysis. “A first look shows that the response rate and distribution among colleges and titles was good,” said London.

Among the top issues on members’ minds are salary increases, job security, workload, Welfare Fund finances, equity and advancement and promotion. “Thousands of comments were recorded and we are in the midst of a detailed analysis of members’ views,” London said. “The survey is a great tool for gaining a nuanced understanding of members’ needs and contract demands.” (The March issue of Clarion will carry more detailed coverage of the survey results.)

Union delegates, members of PSC committees, the Executive Council and broad membership discussion are all part of developing the union’s bargaining agenda. “I’ve been struck by the creativity and sophistication of members’ thinking on the contract,” said Barbara Bowen, PSC president and chief negotiator. “A broad, inclusive process allows us to tap into this.

DETERMINED

While we’re conscious of the revenue shortfalls created by City and State tax policy, we are determined to continue the rebuilding of CUNY begun in the last contract,” Bowen added. “It would be disastrous to stop now, when a strong university is essential to the state’s resurgence. The PSC will seek an agreement that consolidates and extends the gains of the last contract, while addressing areas in which we were not able to make progress last time. We also aim to break new ground, in such areas as health and quality of life.”
Your new contract rights

Reassigned time & HEO gains

By BARBARA BOWEN
PSC President

This is the second article in a series designed to clarify the new provisions of the contract. Last month’s Clarion (available online at www.psc-cuny.org) outlined procedures for adjunct professional hours and the Distinguished Lecturer title; this month’s article explains two of the contract’s most innovative features: reassigned time for scholarly work for untenured faculty and the labor-management committees for Higher Education Officers (HEO).

There are already signs that the provision for reassigned time is proving a significant attraction to young scholars considering positions at CUNY. In December job interviews for a position in my department, I heard more than one candidate react with delight when told that the position included guaranteed time before tenure for research. I suspect that this provision will turn out to be a major element in CUNY’s intellectual renewal. Together with the provision for committees to address HEOs’ most pressing issues, it suggests how the union can use the contract both to resolve problems and to remake the University.

Reassigned time for untenured full-time faculty

1. All full-time untenured Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors, except Librarians and Counselors, appointed to their current title on or after September 1, 2001, are entitled to receive a total of 12 hours of reassigned time to engage in scholarly and/or creative work during their first three annual appointments. This reassigned time is fully funded and is a permanent part of the contract.

2. The 12 hours of reassigned time is an entitlement, not an award to be applied for or granted selectively. It is simply a reconfiguration of the workload of untenured faculty during their first three years. Faculty members are not required to describe in advance how they plan to use the time nor to report on it afterwards, although guidance on preparing for tenure should be a regular part of the annual evaluation with the Department Chair. Departments or colleges may not opt out of providing the full 12 hours, nor may faculty decline the reassigned time.

3. Full-time untenured Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors initially appointed between October 1, 2001 and September 1, 2002 are also included in this provision. Under Section 6.2.f. of CUNY’s bylaws, an appointee who begins service after September 30 does not begin his/her tenure period until the following September. Accordingly, faculty in eligible titles appointed between October 1, 2001 and September 1, 2002 are entitled to the full 12 hours of reassigned time.

4. Also included in the provision for the 12 hours of reassigned time are individuals who served in other CUNY titles prior to September 1, 2002 and were then appointed to eligible titles. For instance, you would be included in the 12-hour provision if you had been a Lecturer and were appointed Assistant Professor on or after September 1, 2002.

4. Faculty Counselors are not included in this provision, but the contract contains an increase in the available number of professional leaves for Faculty Counselors hired on or after September 1, 1998. These Faculty Counselors should consult Article 25.4 of the contract and consider applying for fully paid professional leaves of up to four weeks.

5. Librarians are also not included in this provision, even though they are required to meet publication standards just as other faculty are to achieve tenure. Enhancing access to research time for Librarians is one of the union’s important goals for the next contract.

6. The research or creative agenda of the untenured faculty member should be the primary consideration in scheduling the reassigned time. Department chairs should make every effort to accommodate that agenda, while also taking into account the needs of the department. All 12 hours may be scheduled within a single semester, including the first of a person’s appointment, or the 12 hours may be allocated in other combinations during the first three years.

7. If the faculty member takes all 12 hours of reassigned time in a single semester, she or he is not on leave, but simply on reassigned time. This reassigned time must be considered in terms of both the normal rights and benefits of the position. The scheduling of the hours in this way does not affect the individual’s tenure “clock.”

8. The provision for 12 hours of reassigned time represents a minimum that must be provided to each eligible untenured faculty member. Colleges are free to provide more reassigned time than 12 hours, as some have done in the past. Given the importance of research time to building a career and a university, the union strongly encourages colleges to add the new 12 hours to whatever reassigned time they had been able to offer in the past.

9. In a separate provision of the agreement, the union and the University agreed to attempt to provide some reassigned time to untenured Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors hired between September 1, 2000 and September 30, 2001. Faculty in this category will be notified as soon as a decision is finalized.

Second in a series of articles

YOUR RIGHTS

HEO labor/management committees will start at each campus.
Welfare Fund: restructuring underway

Prescription drug changes first

YOUR BENEFITS

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Note on PICA and Diabetes Drugs

PICA: Most full-time active employees and non-Medicare-eligible retirees will now have two prescription drug cards, the one listed above for basic prescription drug coverage and another provided by the National Pharmacy Association (NPA) for PICA medications (Psychotropic, Injectable, Chemotherapy, and Asthma drugs). Medicare-eligible retirees, adjuncts and full-time EOC employees are covered for PICA drugs under their regular drug card.

Diabetes: Active and retiree members eligible for Medicare receive diabetes medications from their health insurance carrier. Medicare-eligible retirees receive diabetes medications from the Welfare Fund through Medco or through their insurance provider if they are in a plan for which the Fund purchases a prescription drug rider.

On January 1, 2003, changes in the Welfare Fund took effect that begin the process of restoring the Fund to fiscal health. All members who used an NPA card for their Welfare Fund prescription drug benefit will now be covered by the Fund’s new pharmaceutical benefit manager, Medco Health.

A new co-pay structure has also gone into effect for: a 30-day supply at the pharmacy, the co-pay for generic prescription drugs is the cost of the generic drug up to $5 or 20%, whichever is higher; the co-pay for formulary brand name drugs is $15 or 20%, whichever is higher; and the co-pay for non-formulary drugs is $30 or 20%, whichever is higher. A $50 per family annual deductible for retirees was instituted and the mail-order pharmacy has been changed from CFI to Medco Health’s Home Delivery Service.

During December, information from the Welfare Fund and from Medco Health about these changes was sent to all members who participated in the NPA program. If you did not receive your new Medco Health prescription drug card or have questions about your new prescription drug coverage, please call Medco Health at (866) 386-3797. If you continue to have questions about your new prescription drug coverage, please call the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund at (212) 354-5230.

A new federal privacy law will prevent Welfare Fund administrators from having access to an individual member’s drug utilization history. Medco, however, will be able to access this information, so for certain questions Welfare Fund staff may refer you to Medco Customer Service.

Fund members receive prescription drug benefits from different sources which can make it hard to understand our drug benefits. For example, in 2003 the PSC and some municipal unions won an agreement from the City to cover the cost of most members’ Psychotropic, Injectable, Chemotherapy, and Asthma (PICA) medications. While this helped the Welfare Fund’s finances, and in many cases made PICA drugs available at a lower cost with a lower deductible, it made members’ benefits more complicated.

WHICH CARDS

How other prescription drugs are covered can vary with the type of basic health coverage that members have, and whether they are part-time or full-time, active or retired. The accompanying chart will help you sort things out: it shows which prescription drug cards members should have now.

From now on, most members will have two prescription drug cards, one for basic prescription drug coverage and another provided by the National Pharmacy Association (NPA) card provided by the Welfare Fund through Medco or for their primary health insurer.

Full-time active or non-Medicare-eligible, and who receive their health insurance from GHI, the Empire Plans, Vytra, and Health Net all access their prescription drug benefits through Medco Health which is provided by the Welfare Fund. Retiree members whom Medicare is their primary health insurer are also covered by Medco Health. Full-time active and retiree members in HIP, Aetna, CIGNA, and WeCare Fund have their prescription drugs covered by a drug rider purchased on their behalf by the Fund. The same is true for eligible teaching and non-teaching adjuncts in the Empire Plans and EOC members in GHI and HIP.

The changes made thus far will realize about $3.5 million in savings. This amount is $2.5 million short of the Trustees’ goal of saving 8 million in prescription drug costs. The Trustees are reviewing options to generate more savings by restructuring the drug riders provided by the Fund, our dental plan, major medical and catastrophic insurance, and life insurance.
The following was adopted from a talk given at the PSC’s October 26 conference on “Globalization, Privatization, War: In Defense of Public Education in the Americas.” Larry Kuehn, research director for the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, describes how trade agreements contribute to restructuring the university, and why their effect on our working conditions is likely to grow over time. Kuehn is also a member of the coordinating committee of the Civil Society Network for Public Education in the Americas, an organization that he describes below.

For other materials from the October 26 conference, e-mail rbriden1@juno.com, or call 212-662-9634.

In recent years education has been brought into the realm of trade agreements. In part this is due to the developed economies shift from producing goods to producing services. According to the US National Committee for International Trade in Education (NCITE), a lobbying group for private providers of education, “Service jobs account for 70% of US private-sector employment. Even in Canada, where the economy was built on resource extraction rather than manufacturing, more than 70% of employment is now in services. Nevertheless, until recently services were not part of the trade regime. Today, however, there is an effort to think of all services as involving “goods,” not services.

A breakthrough – if one chooses to see it that way – in the negotiations that led to NAFTA was expanding the trading rules to cover services. Exporting services was a particularly important objective for US trade negotiators. The United States “has a surplus of about $80 billion in its trade in services,” according to the NCITE. This surplus in services cancels out a significant portion of the huge US trade deficit in goods, and an estimated 86 billion of the services trade surplus is in education.

Of course, before a service can be traded, it must be commodified and privatized. Even public institutions created to serve a home public, if they want to have, to package their service as a product that can be sold. In my own home province, our new right-wing government is intent on turning our public education system into a product sold internationally. It is negotiating to open twenty private schools in China, Japan and Taiwan, using British Columbia curriculum, teachers and tests, offering a graduation certificate that would provide access to BC’s public universities. In effect, the public schools in Canada are creating private schools overseas to fund public schools in Canada.

Conceiving of education as a tradable commodity is an assault on the entire conception of public education – the common school and the creation of an educated public as building blocks of democracy.

NAFTA and GATS

If trade in education is to be expanded, then you need rules to keep it free of restrictions from pesky citizens who want to preserve their own local, public institutions. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) therefore included such rules, and their reach would be expanded under the proposed agreement for a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). The FTAA is supposed to be in place by 2005, though the Workers’ Party election victory in Brazil and the economic disasters in Argentina and Uruguay may slow things down.

NAFTA and GATS include a “ratchet effect” on commodification and privatization: once a service is privatized, these agreements can prevent it from being moved back into the public sector. If a public institution is able to make a service available free or at lower cost because it is supported by taxes, this may be deemed a “subsidy” which constitutes “unfair competition” with private providers.

The Fraser Institute, a right-wing Canadian think tank, applauded NAFTA for just this reason. They said it would protect against a populist government being elected and then bringing privatized services back into the public sector. In other words, trade rules can trump democracy.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is part of this story as well. Within the WTO, negotiations are under way for an expansion of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). The NCITE reports that “US services industry goals for these [GATS] negotiations are am-bitious. They include securing the right to establish commercial operations and the right to full majority ownership, the right to be treated on equal terms with local providers, the expansion of commitments to free cross-border trade, the ability to move professionals for short-term assignments in other countries without visa and other red tape delays.”

These high-sounding principles mean that if private, for-profit Phoenix University wanted to open a program in Vancouver it could not be prohibited from doing so, even if the government adopted the principle that all education should be public. Phoenix University would have to be treated the same as local public universities – offered the same student loans or other so-called subsidies, for example. A government could not make regulations – for example, that a university must have a particular right to be accredited – that would restrict the rights of a private corporate competitor. (For a detailed analysis of the GATS and education, see Perils: The Impact of the WTO Services Agreement (GATS) on Canada’s Public Education System from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, available through www.policyalternatives.ca.)

OPPOSITION

While the forces pushing globalization and privatization are powerful and pervasive, voices of opposition do exist. The reach and impact of opposition can be magnified if those who support a public sphere and challenge privatization can develop links and work to support one another.

In response to NAFTA, education activists in the US, Mexico and Canada established the Tri-national Coalition in Defense of Public Education. The FTAA and GATS sparked the formation of the Civil Society Network in Defense of Public Education in the Americas (most often called Red-SEPA since the Spanish acronym sounds nicer). In the context of globalization, it is clear that we must work together if we are to have any opportunity to challenge these agreements, that are so anti-democratic and destructive of solidarity, equity and public institutions.

How can we promote democracy and the right for us to make decisions that affect our local community? How can we ensure that education is valued as a public good, rather than being turned into a commodity?

WORLD BANK VS. TEACHERS

Most of the research carried out on education issues in Latin America today is funded by the World Bank. These organizations are cited as the main opponents of the “reforms” that the World Bank wants to impose. Good for teacher unions. In fact, if we want to have research that is independent of the World Bank’s neo-liberal agenda, teacher unions need to do it. The Civil Society Network has begun this kind of work, with a cross-country research effort examining three major topics: standardized testing, decentralization, and the development of a health and safety code for students and teachers.

Beyond research, we can bring a strategic consciousness of the global context to local and national struggles in defense of public education. We need to counter the neo-liberal alignment of education with the market by offering an alternative program for public education, both nationally and internationally. And we need to join international campaigns for social rights, including the right to an education and the right for workers to form organizations that protect their rights.

It would be great to have the PSC join us in this work. We have to challenge a system that puts trade and the rights of corporations above solidarity, democracy and public education.
Our constitutional right to strike

By JIM POPE

When New York City’s transit workers threatened to strike in December, the Mayor urged the courts to fine their union $1,000,000 and each striker $25,000 per day on strike. The press heartily approved. One daily newspaper claimed that the union was conducting a “jihad” against the city, while another called for firing every transit worker who dared to strike. Mayor Bloomberg raised the specter of people dying in traffic jams because they couldn’t reach a hospital in time.

The image of a person stuck in traffic on the way to the hospital is gut-wrenching—but what got lost in all the shouting were the deaths of subway workers Joy Anthony and Baby Kurien, killed on successive days less than a month before the strike deadline. Both workers were on track repair crews that lacked a flagger, a worker assigned to warn oncoming trains that they are entering a work area. These were real, not hypothetical deaths, and the reason is simple: US law makes it virtually impossible for most workers to win a strike. In the public sector, the strike is banned outright in four out of five states, including New York. In the private sector, employers enjoy the right to punish workers for striking by giving their jobs to permanent replacements. According to a recent study of collective bargaining negotiations, employers are now more likely to threaten workers with permanent replacement than unions are to threaten employers with a strike.

POWER PLAY

Most university professionals would have a hard time imagining going on strike—so why should we care? The short answer is that the strike is the only form of economic power that can enable working people to offset the concentrated economic power of corporations—both inside and outside the university. As the right to strike is weakened, so are unions—and along with them the countervailing political power to corporations. Since 1980, when President Ronald Reagan’s attack on striking air-traffic controllers gave the green light to strikebreaking, workers’ real wages have stagnated while chief executive salaries have quintupled; CIO salaries are now 531 times the average worker’s pay. Growing corporate influence over government policy on taxes, the environment, trade and health care is part of the same trend. Today, with universities increasingly organized on corporate lines, even our academic unions can be pushed toward the last resort of the strike. For example, in 1996 the AAUP council at Rutgers took a strike vote, which helped win a contract in the face of President Francis Lawrence’s determined hostility.

The Thirteenth Amendment provides: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude . . . shall exist within the United States.” Last fall, West Coast dockworkers picketed with homemade signs reading “Taft law: plain ole slavery.” They were protesting against yet another legal obstacle to striking: the Taft-Hartley “national emergency” injunction. At first glance, the claim that a strike prohibition amounts to slavery seems silly. Longshore workers enjoy relatively high wages, and their union remains one of the few capable of striking and winning despite the labor law. AMPLIFIED PROFITS

But the dockworkers have a point. The injunction forced them to work on the employers’ terms. It took away their right to withhold labor in order to obtain a share of their industry’s ample profits. Yes, their wages are high, but that is only because—beginning with the great Pacific longshore strike of 1934—the maritime corporations have had to respect their bargaining power. If the purpose of the Thirteenth Amendment is, as the Supreme Court once said, “to make labor free by prohibiting that control by which the personal service of one person is disposed of or coerced for another’s benefit,” then the right to strike must be protected.
The state’s choices & you

By STEVE LONDON
PSC First Vice President

New Yorkers spent January waiting for the other shoe to drop. Early in the month, Governor Pataki finally used the word “crisis” to describe the State’s fiscal situation, after avoiding that unpleasant reality until he was officially inaugurated for his third term.

Although a recent discovery for Pataki, New York State’s financial circumstances haven’t exactly been a secret. There are daily newspaper stories about dire fiscal conditions in New York and almost every other state in the nation. With the collective short-fall for state budgets estimated at 860-880 billion in the next fiscal year, we hear of school budgets cut, higher education slashed, public workers laid off and regressive taxes increased. Is this our future? Not necessarily. While the fiscal condition of New York and other states is indeed dire, and these large deficits arose suddenly, they result largely from seven years of aggressive tax cutting, a failed national health policy that sticks states with a rising bill for Medicaid, the budget demands of new security measures and redistribution of income upward to the rich. All these have collided with a national recession and a slow recovery. The current fiscal crisis is a result of a set of policy choices that can be undone.

TAX CUTS

The most recent Fiscal Survey of States, by the National Governors Association and National Association of State Budget Officers, reports on the states’ general fund expenditures. After increasing taxes in response to the recession of the early 1990s, states slashed taxes from 1995 to 2001. The total cumulative impact of these tax reductions during this seven-year period was $117 billion. Despite the tax cutting, the boom years allowed the states to modestly increase their budgets each year (ranging from 1.6% to 5.2%) and sock away some money for rainy day funds. By 2001, the ending balance in the states’ general revenue fund was a healthy 7.8% as a percentage of expenditures.

But the 2001 recession collapsed tax revenues and the rainy day funds were quickly used up. Aggressive tax cutting had produced a tax structure not able to sustain current expenditures in a depressed economy: presto, instant fiscal crisis.

New York City and State followed the same trends, but are in worse shape than most for several reasons. The World Trade Center terrorist attack and Washington’s slow and narrow response to recovery efforts have hurt; at year’s end only $4.5 billion of the promised $21 billion in aid had been delivered to the City and State. Also, eight years of Giuliani and Pataki social and economic policy have left the City and State with an eroded wage base and more regressive tax structure, log-sided economic development with an over-reliance on Wall Street, a depleted public sector, and the greatest income inequality in the nation.

But there is good news for New York in this litany of woes:

1) We are not in this alone. Democratic and Republican politicians across the country are looking to Washington for economic relief. Various forms of revenue-sharing and additional Medicaid funding are now on the national agenda. (Medicaid, increasing at an annual rate of 13.5%, is now the second most expensive budget item for the states.) In this context, New Yorkers have the most compelling case to make for assistance and we have allies in pressing our claims for relief.

2) Higher education is part of the solution to the current economic crisis. Broad-based economic development is a necessary component of recovery and CUNY is an essential part of jump-starting the city and state economies. Educating and training the working class of New York, CUNY’s historic mission, is not only a matter of social justice – it is good economic policy.

This message has been road-tested. During the latest round of City budget reductions (with the mayor asking for a $1 billion midyear cut), CUNY emerged relatively unscathed. Both City Council leaders and ultimately the mayor responded positively to the message from our members, who lobbied successfully for full restoration of CUNY community college funds.

3) Because New York City and State implemented deeper tax cuts for the wealthy than most states, today they have more room to recapture revenue by enacting a more progressive tax policy. Most working New Yorkers were not on board for the ride up in the 1990s and we should not hear the burden as the economy slows down. Fairness and good economic policy demand that those who benefited most from the 1990s boom should pay their fair share.

WHO SHOULD PAY?

Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz argues that during a recession it is better for economic recovery to increase the marginal tax on the wealthy than to slash public services. The reason is that dollars put into the public sector tend to go into the pockets of working people where they will be spent, increasing economic activity. Cutting public sector services, says Stiglitz, is counterproductive.

Now is the time to mobilize politically to change those policies that have failed us. While this will be difficult, we have a good chance of success. Our recent victory at the City Council is a case in point. Another positive sign is the fact that the Bush administration is being forced to deal with the states’ fiscal crisis in its economic “stimulus” package. While the proposal is still a huge giveaway to the rich, it has been widely reported that the administration is feeling political pressure and is positioning itself to bargain away these tax cuts for the wealthy for federal aid to the states. The fact that Bush doubled the size of the package to $800 billion (in just one weekend) shows that there is money available: the only question is how it will be spent.

The fact that Bush doubled the size of the package to $800 billion (in just one weekend) shows that there is money available: the only question is how it will be spent.

In the coming months, we call on you to take the time to respond to requests for political action and become a visible advocate for CUNY. We have friends and allies in this struggle – but we can’t win without member involvement. Now, as always, CUNY’s future is in your hands.

POETRY

Two by Nicole Cooley

Mater dolorosa

Write against narrative: here is the television’s blue square of light,

her world each day while we pretend not to see the television,

It starts with missing the original arms around me.

It starts with the sky as it leaks light, the plane circling

circling Jamaica Bay, dumping fuel.

It starts with the baby who renames

America

Help make your
Credit Union
stronger

PSC/CUNY Federal Credit Union (FCU) celebrates 23 years of service this year. Like all credit unions, PSC/CUNY FCU is a not-for-profit financial cooperative owned by the members. This means if you use the Credit Union, you are a part owner. You can be part of making your Credit Union stronger. The Board of Directors and other Credit Union committees, for example, are composed of volunteers.

You’re invited to get involved with your Credit Union by becoming a volunteer on the Advisory Committee or the Good Will Team. The Advisory Committee is responsible for overseeing and recommending new services. The Good Will Team consists of volunteers who serve as representatives of PSC/CUNY FCU on the various CUNY campuses.

Please join in the rewarding efforts to fulfill the PSC/CUNY FCU mission of “People Helping People.” Be a volunteer! If you are interested, call 212-354-2238 x244.

And if you are not yet a member, please call to join.
The Bush administration is considering ending the Perkins Vocational and Technical Education Act, and CUNY faculty and staff have responded with a campaign to preserve this vital source of funding.

The Perkins Act funds vocational, technical and academic support programs in community colleges, secondary schools and other educational institutions all over the United States; it is up for reauthorization in October 2003.

At CUNY, the six community colleges and four comprehensive colleges (those with both four-year and two-year programs) are scheduled to receive nearly $9 million of the $21 million allocated to colleges in New York State this fiscal year. “New York is the largest consumer of Perkins dollars,” said Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton in a December 3 press conference at BMCC.

Eliminating the Perkins program “would have a disproportionate impact on New York,” Clinton said.

BMCC receives the largest amount of Perkins funds of any school in New York State, $1.6 million. This money supports services for learning-disabled students, tutoring, supplemental instruction, laboratory staff, distance education and test preparation. “Using the services that Perkins funds are really critical,” Nizaliz Paulino, a former BMCC student now studying at Hunter and tutoring at BMCC, said at the press conference. These services strengthen “the skills [we need] to have a successful experience here at BMCC,” Paulino said. Andres Amador, a supervisor in the Learning Resource Center, agreed: “Taking out this money would be a catastrophe for our students.”

DESTRUCTION

Marianne Pitta, PSC chapter chair at Bronx Community College (BCC), said that at her school Perkins funds are used with “a major focus on retention.” Academic advisement, tutoring, and student development at BCC all benefit from the Perkins program. Many BCC departments, from music to medical technology, receive Perkins aid to support their computer labs and update equipment. “The elimination of Perkins would be a devastating loss,” she said.

With so much at stake, CUNY is organizing to save the program. Word of the possible cuts spread to campuses across CUNY primarily through CC-NET, the PSC’s community college e-mail listserve. A letter-writing campaign to New York’s Senators and Representatives was begun. At LaGuardia, English professor Phyllis Van Slyck distributed her letter to legislators to college community and urged others to write their own. BMCC student groups encouraged their members to write letters and make calls and visits to legislators, drawing an active response. A PSC resolution supporting full funding of the Perkins Act has been sent to New York legislators, and the union is working with its state and national affiliates, NYSSUT and the AFT, to coordinate lobbying.

CUNY’s University Faculty Senate also has passed a resolution (resolved by the AFT) in favor of the Perkins Act, and the university has also passed a resolution in defense of Perkins, at the initiative of the EPS Community College Caucus. The American Association of Community Colleges is spreading the word about the issue, and CUNY’s Chancellor Matthew Goldstein has written to Education Secretary Rodrick Paige to detail the harm that would befall CUNY colleges as a result of cuts to the Perkins Act.

The Perkins program was first established in 1964, building on existing services for technical skills in current or emerging employment sectors, and was most recently reauthorized in 1998. While the Bush administration has not publicly called for axing the Perkins Act, Capitol Hill sources said that the White House is considering the move to deal with a budget squeeze caused by massive tax cuts and growing war expenses.

Sen. Clinton explained that eliminating the $1.2 billion Perkins program has been proposed as a way to reduce a $3 billion shortfall in the Pell Grant funding and “robbing Perkins to pay for Pell, a very bad bargain,” she said. Clinton praised the role of community colleges and hailed them as a “unique contribution to higher education made by the United States.”

The pro-industry slant of these appointments is an expert in ergonomics who has caused a storm of protest in the scientific community. In recent months, the administration has stacked an advisory committee on environmental health with industry-friendly members, while excluding respected scientists who lack industry connections. Committees on genetic testing and human research, which according to the Washington Post had offended industry and the religious right, were closed down before their work was complete."

VIEWS ON ABORTION

When Corinne Peek-Asa, associate professor of occupational health at the University of Iowa, was nominated to a federal scientific study section, she got a call from Mike Davis of the HHS Secretary’s office. “The first question was how I describe my political views,” she told Clarion. “Then he asked what I think of the current Bush administration, then the Clinton administration.” In addition to discussing her views on the two Presidents’ policies on the environment, foreign affairs and health care, “he asked me very specifically what I thought about stem cell research and what I thought about abortion.”

Of these questions has anything to do with Peek-Asa’s training, or her research on accident prevention, she was not named for the study section. Politicizing federal study sections is of even deeper concern than lack of balance in a policy advisory panel, argues Dana Loomis, professor of epidemiology at University of North Carolina. She thinks the political bias questioning Peek-Asa received threatens the process of peer review itself.

“Study sections have a very simple and rather narrow charge,” Loomis said in an interview. “To review grant proposals for scientific merit and rank them. That’s it.” She emphasized that they are not allowed to consider potential policy implications—difficult to do in any case, since the outcome of a study cannot be known in advance. Loomis chairs a study section for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), for which three of six recent nominees have been rejected.

“The rejected nominees are established scientists who had already served as temporary members for some time, and whose qualifications had been reviewed and approved at every other level,” Loomis wrote in a protest of note. The reasons for the decision “seem omnously clear in at least one case: one of the rejected nominees is an expert in ergonomics who has publicly supported a workplace ergonomics standard.”

QUALIFIED

That nominee, Laura Punnett of UMass Lowell, said, “No one has questioned my qualifications. Clear-ly the message is that it’s my politics.” She added that she was offended by any implication that she could not be a fair judge of scientific quality: “I work very hard at reviewing applications neutraly.” The other rejected nominees include a former faculty member at Hunter College, Manuell Gomez, who is now director of scientific affairs at the National Association for Industrial Hygiene Association. Gomez said he was huffed by his rejection.

William Pierce of the Department of Health and Human Services defended the department’s decisions. “I think it has gotten lost in shuffle that Congress explicitly gave this authority to the Secretary, to make his appointments as he wishes,” Pierce told Clarion. “We’re now appointing who we want to, in science, there are different points of view based on the science, but still different points of view.”

NIOSH’s Board of Scientific Counselors wrote to Sec. Thompson in December, expressing its unanimous concern about the “politicization of the peer-review process,” according to board chair James Merchant of the University of Iowa.

“The broader implications are potentially chilling, because this creates an atmosphere of an attempt to exert political control over what research gets done,” commented Loomis. “A free society should never be afraid of knowledge.”