

# Clarion

NEWSPAPER OF THE PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS / CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



APRIL 2022



**ANTI-RACISM**

**Pushing the admin**

A hate incident at Queens College is unresolved.

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Erik McGregor

## THE CITY AND STATE UNITED FOR HIGHER ED

The PSC leads the way in the struggle for a transformative budget for public higher education in the state. From Brooklyn to Buffalo, students, faculty and staff from CUNY and SUNY are coming together to build the statewide campaign. **PAGES 2-3, 6-7**

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Tired of constant problems with late and short pay-checks, science fellows at the Graduate Center organize and fight back. The campaign is making gains. **PAGE 4**

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Rank-and-file members take up the fight to keep their campuses healthy and safe. Read about why one member stepped up during this critical time. **PAGE 8**



### **EDUCATION** DOE and CUNY ties

Some City Council members believe that the city's K-12 schools should work more closely with CUNY to ease students' transition into college. **PAGE 9**



# Council to state: pass ND4C

By ARI PAUL and SHOMIAL AHMAD

The chorus calling for the State Legislature to pass the New Deal for CUNY (ND4C) has grown. The New York City Council passed a resolution on March 10 supporting the PSC-backed state-level legislation that would make CUNY free and add full-time faculty and counselors.

“CUNY has been a proven stepping-stone to economic prosperity to these communities despite decades of underfunding cuts and lacking staff-to-student ratios. That’s why I believe now is the time for us to double down on our city’s public higher education system,” said New York City Council Member Justin Brannan, the resolution’s prime sponsor, during a hearing of the City Council’s Committee on Higher Education on February 25. “We can end these challenges and truly equip CUNY to build even further on what it has delivered to New Yorkers for so many decades. It is truly time for something big and bold, and New York needs the New Deal for CUNY.”

## LAWMAKER SUPPORT

At a press conference in City Hall Park before the full City Council voted on the resolution, Brannan said that supporting the resolution was the first step in the fight to push for

## A city resolution in support of a free CUNY



At a March 10 press conference in front of City Hall, City Council Member Justin Brannan, who represents District 43 in Brooklyn, said that city support for a New Deal for CUNY was the first step in securing more funding for the university.

more funding for CUNY. “The City Council has your back in this fight,” he said. “That is our promise to you.”

State Assembly Member Karines Reyes, the Assembly coauthor of the New Deal for CUNY legislation, told the City Council in February that she knows firsthand how a CUNY education can transform lives. In the 1990s, she emigrated

from the Dominican Republic with her mother, who attended LaGuardia Community College and took English and accounting courses. Reyes is a two-time CUNY graduate. She received a bachelor’s degree from Baruch College and a nursing degree from Bronx Community College.

## CUNY, an engine for economic mobility

“My borough of the Bronx has nearly 40,000 students and approximately 2,000 faculty that rely on CUNY as their ticket to opportunity. The wonders that a good college education, especially a quality CUNY education, can do in the lives of New Yorkers are present in my own personal story,” Reyes said.

Rebecca Smart, the PSC part-time liaison at Baruch College and an adjunct lecturer at Baruch and the Borough of Manhattan Community College, told the panel how the New Deal for CUNY could be a boon for adjuncts because it would move some adjuncts into full-time positions. When adjuncts aren’t assigned classes to teach, they don’t get paid, Smart said, noting that during her 10 years of teaching on a part-time salary, she has at times had to use welfare programs to support herself.

## TRANSFORMING LIVES

At the same time, she said, she watched her own daughter forego re-enrollment at Brooklyn College this year because her daughter – and Smart for that matter – could not afford to pay tuition at the same university that Smart has dedicated a decade of teaching to. Free tuition would help families like hers.

“The New Deal for CUNY could be life-changing for myself, for my daughter and for my students who need me to provide time that I just don’t have because of how much work I have to do,” Smart said. “There is part of me that is really mad right now because I have been saying these same things about my living conditions, my working conditions for at least four to five years now. This is not a new story.”

The City Council’s adoption of the resolution, the union said, was a major win in the larger campaign to pass a New Deal for CUNY.

# Counselors and advisors are vital to CUNY

By ARI PAUL

Several staff members at the Hunter College Office of Advising left during the pandemic and their positions remain unfilled, said Alex Rosero, the office’s assistant director. The increased workload for him and his coworkers, in addition to the stress of living and working during a pandemic, has been intense. And for students, the situation has meant fewer advisors are available to serve their needs.

“It’s difficult to get a timely appointment,” Rosero told *Clarion*, talking about how a smaller staff has resulted in decreased student services. “There’s a finite number of appointments.”

## NEEDED SUPPORT

This is an all-too-common tale around CUNY. Governor Kathy Hochul’s Executive Budget already includes a major part of the PSC-backed landmark bill, the New Deal for CUNY: the creation of new full-time faculty positions. For the PSC and for student activists, this is a partial victory. The union’s bill also calls for the hiring of new full-time counselors and advisors, which CUNY students desperately need.

“I see many students come to campus believing that a high school model of having a guidance counselor and psychological support will be available in college. They are often shocked, confused

## Navigating the pandemic

and overwhelmed when they discover the support is not the same,” said Cindy Bink, the PSC chapter chair for higher education officers. “While many of our campuses offer some staffing, it is not enough. The process for obtaining financial aid is complicated and extremely bureaucratic. One mistake can cost a student their tuition and their academic future. Students need help navigating through college and understanding the rigor of academic life so that they can succeed.”

Bink, the director of counseling at City Tech, stressed that mental health counselors play a vital role for students. “Without permanent ongoing support, our students can become lost and either fail out or drop out. Either way, it is a loss for CUNY and New York City,” she told *Clarion*.

## Giving guidance throughout college

“Part-time employees are not the answer. We need to form a bond with students over the course of their enrollment. This is what permanent full-time academic advisors, financial aid advisors and mental health professionals can accomplish. With changes in remote learning and returning to campus, our students need more, not less. If we want our enrollment to be maintained or rise, the supports for students need to be there,” said Bink.

Students and PSC activists have highlighted this problem throughout the pandemic. In October 2021, *Clarion* reported that the university improved its mental health professionals-to-student ratio from 1:2,595 to 1:1,621, by hiring 54 part-time and nine full-time clinical workers, according to Denise Maybank, CUNY’s

interim vice chancellor for student affairs and enrollment management, who testified before New York City Council. However, the improved ratio was “still far from the 1:1,500 ratio

recommended by the International Accreditation of Counseling Services (IACS),” *Clarion* reported, adding that the hiring was a temporary fix because the “clinicians were hired with federal stimulus money, and as Maybank explained, the resources [were] ‘time-limited.’”

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Victoria O'Shea, an ASAP student advisor at Queensborough Community College, has seen how students suffer from long wait times to see advisors.

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# A movement for higher ed advances

By ARI PAUL

They came from as nearby as Park Slope, Brooklyn and as far north as Plattsburgh. They were from SUNY and CUNY – faculty, staff, students and alumni. There were state lawmakers from both houses. There were political and community groups, representing people from all around the city. On March 6, nearly 1,000 people joined the PSC and the union representing SUNY faculty and staff, United University Professions (UUP) for a rally, demanding that the state budget include full funding for CUNY and funding for the New Deal for CUNY (ND4C), which would fund the hiring of more full-time faculty and staff and make CUNY tuition-free.

The demonstrators rallied in Downtown Brooklyn, marched across the Brooklyn Bridge and gathered at Foley Square in Manhattan near New York City Hall. The event was perhaps the most visible part of a multipronged strategy to push for a transformative budget for public higher education in the state after decades of chronic underfunding. PSC President James Davis told the crowd that the final budget should go beyond what the CUNY Board of Trustees asked for. “We need a transformative investment,” he said.

More than 70 state lawmakers have signaled support for the ND4C. The governor’s Executive Budget and the New York State Legislature’s counterproposal both offer increases to public higher education. Both are good signs that Governor Kathy Hochul’s administration is committed to reversing the years of brutal austerity imposed by her predecessor, Andrew Cuomo.

## A PROMISING BUDGET

In March, the union’s position in the state budget fight was looking bright. *Politico New York* reported that the “senate’s plans call for the implementation of a ‘New Deal’ funding program for public colleges” that would “give CUNY an additional \$500 million and SUNY an additional \$600 million,” including “\$153 million earmarked for the hiring of new staff.” And, as our union previously reported, the governor’s proposal included a “combined \$1.5 billion increase in operating support for CUNY and SUNY over the next five years, including an additional \$170 million for CUNY senior colleges next year.”

As this newspaper went to press at the end of March, PSC members and principal officers were in Albany, attending a whirlwind of events, including demonstrations, lobbying efforts, press conferences and outreach to ensure that the ND4C would be funded in the state budget on April 1. Nothing was certain in Albany at the time, but the union’s leadership was hopeful about one thing: state funding for public higher education seemed on track to receive a significant boost, the result of extensive organizing and steady political pressure by PSC members.

## Unions and students show their strength



CUNY and SUNY students, union members and allies marched from Brooklyn to Manhattan, to demand more funding for public higher education in New York.

In the first few months of 2022, PSC activists attended countless meetings with lawmakers, spoke to the media at press conferences in the city and in Albany, testified before state legislators and participated in other forms of outreach.

The PSC has helped build an extraordinary coalition (see story below), which includes student groups and other anti-austerity, pro-education activists. In the middle

### The end of the state budget campaign

of March, more than 130 faith leaders from around the state and from many different religious backgrounds signed a letter calling on the state to put an additional \$1 billion for SUNY and CUNY in this year’s budget.

“We must make higher education accessible to all in this state, and that means ensuring our SUNY and CUNY institutions have enough faculty, enough support staff

and can again be tuition free, so that students do not have to weigh getting a degree against taking on years or decades of debt,” said Imam Shahid Farooqi, president of the Islamic Circle of North America Council for Social Justice in Nassau County.

The ND4C enjoys wide support in both chambers of the State Legislature, and the New York City Council passed a resolution in support of the state bill (see page 2). Karines Reyes, a coauthor of the ND4C bill

before the State Assembly and a CUNY graduate, told the crowd on March 6 that the bill has faced no opposition – a rarity in Albany politics. She said that there was a clear reason for this. “Everyone in the state and in the city benefits from a strong public higher education system,” said Reyes.

State Senator Jabari Brisport, who represents parts of Brooklyn, told the crowd, “If we need to tax the rich, we will do that.”

## NEXT CONTRACT CAMPAIGN

PSC leaders have noted that while the governor’s budget proposal is ambitious in terms of ensuring the hiring of more full-time faculty at CUNY, the university still must hire more full-time mental health counselors and other advisors. PSC leaders believe that the state must deliver on that aspect of the bill (see story, page 2), and it must also make the university free for its undergraduate students, as it once was.

All of this organizing is part of a broader campaign leading up to the next contract fight. The current union contract with CUNY expires next spring. The PSC hopes to build upon the economic victories made in the last contract campaign, where the union won across-the-board raises as well as significant gains for adjuncts.

But in order to win economic gains in the next contract, the union and its allies must address the chronic underfunding of CUNY. Increased funding in this state budget is a part of the campaign. The next part is securing increased funding for community colleges in the city budget in June. And it also means passing the New Deal for CUNY.

# Building statewide power for PSC

## Strong coalitions matter

By ANDREA VÁSQUEZ  
PSC First Vice President

Over the past year, the New Deal for CUNY (ND4C) legislation, which seeks to transform state funding for CUNY, has generated increased attention and support among a wide range of organizations, labor unions and lawmakers. Additionally, the CUNY administration made a relatively ambitious budget request that begins to meet the needs of the university and the governor’s Executive Budget proposal adds an additional \$120 million to CUNY’s budget.

The recently released one-house bills of the New York State Senate and Assembly have proposed that Governor Kathy Hochul increase her investment in CUNY by another \$400 million, in an effort to move closer to achieving some of the budgetary goals found in the New Deal for CUNY. The PSC recognizes and greatly appreciates the proposed state budgets, Governor Kathy Hochul’s Executive Budget and the one-



The local agenda of the Democratic Socialists of America has focused heavily on fighting for the full funding of CUNY.

house budget agreed upon by State Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie. The PSC hopes

to see the full amount proposed in the one-house bills in the final budget. The enormity of this shift in the funding structure of CUNY, and

more generally, in public higher education, cannot be overstated. While some factors that play into this shift may have been unpredictable and sudden, others stem from years of persistent coalition building and the development of a piece of legislation that lays out the budget that CUNY needs to meet the educational aspirations of CUNY students, faculty and staff.

## A VISION FOR CUNY

The New Deal for CUNY legislation packaged many of CUNY’s key needs into a budget and legislative “ask” that resonated with the politics and vision for CUNY of many influential groups. The Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Caucus in the State Legislature endorsed ND4C, as did the New York City Council. Student groups in CUNY Rising Alliance (CRA), including such as NYPIRG, University Student Senate, Young Invincibles and the Young Democratic Socialists of America, all made the

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# Doctoral students confront pay glitches

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Getting a paycheck at the right time in the right amount is not routine for many doctoral student workers at the Graduate Center (GC). Keeping track of pay sometimes involves a separate research project with a detailed Excel sheet and field research at Human Resources (HR) offices across CUNY. After years of organizing around the issue, the Graduate Center administration has taken some concrete steps to fix the issue.

"In any other situation, if you have an issue getting paid, it should be an easy fix. But here, [graduate students] have to go on a scavenger hunt," said Nora Awadallah, a fifth-year doctoral student in the neuroscience program and a biology department steward for the PSC Graduate Center Chapter. "It takes weeks to sometimes months to hear back [and potentially fix these issues]."

## DIFFERENT PAYCHECKS

It's a Byzantine financial system, to be sure. Most graduate students in doctoral science programs are paid through multiple funding streams, beginning in their second year of study. They typically receive pay from the Graduate Center, the CUNY campus where they are conducting their research and through the Research Foundation of CUNY, a private-sector not-for-profit educational corporation that administers the grants that faculty receive for their labs where the science fellows work. Their paychecks from these sources often vary. Appointments are sometimes renewed every six months, which means if there is a change of assignment, new HR paperwork must be filed.

Problems with doctoral student pay at the GC aren't new and have been an issue for doctoral students for more than a decade.

"Not only are there a lot of opportunities for something to go wrong, given that you're renewing three different sources of pay twice a year, but when something does go wrong, it's very hard to figure out what went wrong and who to talk to and how to get it fixed," said Rob Veline, a second-year doctoral student in the neuroscience program.

This January, some science fellows took part in a public action. Neuroscience graduate students (a subprogram in the biology department) did not participate in the program's admissions season at the end of January, where doctoral students traditionally volunteer their time helping to recruit prospective PhD candidates to the program. The fellows also posted their issues with pay on Twitter and received support from faculty at CUNY and science graduate students at other institutions.

"The number of trainees affected by this situation is galling. @GC\_CUNY, please make the administrative changes necessary to ensure that this systemic neglect of

## Persistent organizing forces reforms



(L-R) GC doctoral science student workers Carolina Fernandes Henriques, Nora Awadallah, Matthew Cleere and PSC GC Chapter Vice Chair Harry Blain organized to bring attention to long-standing pay issues.

our trainees ends," tweeted Orie T. Shafer, a Graduate Center biology professor, who heads the Shafer Lab, a neuroscience initiative at the Advanced Science Research Center. "As admissions chair for @CUNYNeuro, I fully support this action by our graduate students," he added.

There was an effective student boycott. One of the banner programs of the day, the student presentations on research, and a virtual social meeting with current students were both canceled. Since doctoral students do not get paid to participate in the admissions season, but they volunteer their time as students, the action was not a violation of the state's Taylor Law, which prohibits public-sector workers from striking, or withholding their work, even if it is for a few hours.

## GRAD CENTER RESPONSE

It's after that public action that could harm admissions numbers and thus lower a program's rankings, that the Graduate Center administration responded.

"The leadership at the Graduate Center and CUNY Central are deeply concerned about delays in payments for a number of PhD students in the sciences," wrote Graduate Center President Robin Garrell and Provost Steve Everett in a joint January 31 email to Graduate Center students. "The burden of figuring out what

is causing a payment delay and the remedy should not fall to students, individually or collectively. It is the responsibility of CUNY to create efficient payment systems that can provide funds to our students on a predictable schedule."

**'It's a rolling cycle of small fires.'**

Among the remedies proposed by the administration was the creation of a reporting portal where students would be able to submit information about delayed payments.

In mid-February, the studentpay@gc.CUNY.edu email for reporting pay issues was set up. *Clarion* reached out to GC officials for further details. Messages are monitored daily by the GC Provost's Office, which addresses or engages the appropriate person, office or campus for each request to ensure that payment issues are fixed as soon as possible. It also allows GC officials to identify recurring issues and frees doctoral students from the burden of finding their own solutions to pay issues.

"We are working toward the goal of significantly reducing the number of delayed payment cases going forward. Having this process in place to address individual issues is an important part of that solution," said Tanya Domi, director of media relations at the Graduate Center.

The response from administration came after years of organizing. Beginning in 2019, Matthew Cleere, a science fellow who at the time was in his second year of the molecular, cellular

and developmental biology program, encountered problems. That year, he had spent countless hours trying to figure out tax withholding inaccuracies in his paycheck. Once that problem was solved, he had another pay issue, where he was not getting paid. He likened his pay issues to playing a game of hot potato, where one human resources official would pass him off to another with no movement towards a solution. Many of his emails went unanswered.

## PERVASIVE ISSUES

Then his experience became more like whack-a-mole: once one problem was finally solved, weeks or months later, another, different problem with pay came up. At first, he thought the issues were unique to him.

After talking to another student at a biology program meeting, he discovered that he was not alone. Cleere and his colleagues began to organize. Together they conducted surveys, spoke out at departmental meetings, pushed to have the issue brought up at the GC's Graduate Council meeting and sought letters of support from the executive officers who act as the department heads of many science programs.

In May 2021, more than 160 Graduate Center faculty and students signed an open letter to GC President Garrell, highlighting systemic failures in pay. Their efforts, were met with sympathy but no solutions.

In Spring 2021, Cleere brought the extent of the issue to the attention of the PSC Graduate Center Chapter, which has brought up the issue at nearly every labor-management meeting since.

"We've brought [the science fellows] into our union steward structure and now they regularly come to meetings with people who are union activists across the chapter," said Harry Blain, a fifth-year doctoral student in political science and the vice chair of the PSC GC Chapter. Blain told *Clarion* that the chapter meetings became a place to build solidarity. "They get validation and added commitment because those students are also appalled at what the science fellows are going through."

## TOWARD A FIX

One doctoral student went an entire semester without receiving their research stipend. In another instance, a campus Human Resources office misplaced a grad worker's paperwork for months, causing a lapse in health insurance during the pandemic. Students have borrowed from credit cards. One took a personal loan of \$1,400 to pay rent because they were too embarrassed to again ask family and friends to borrow money, according to surveys that the graduate students conducted to document the extent of the issue.

In May 2021, the Graduate Center administration followed up with its own survey conducted by the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness to doctoral students in biology, biochemistry, chemistry and physics. Nearly a third of students surveyed reported missing a paycheck; nearly a third were paid the incorrect amount; and more than 40% reported receiving late paychecks. Fourteen percent said pay problems occurred more than five times a year, and another 17% said they occurred "very often or always." One problem with multiple late paychecks is that once a student is paid in a lump sum, they are often taxed in a higher tax bracket and will not recover the lost money until their tax refunds.

"It's a rolling cycle of small fires," said Cleere, describing the "systemic issue" that he and other science fellows deal with. He stated that several of his colleagues have given up trying to get the money that they are owed because the hassle of getting it solved is not worth their time.

Many science fellows told *Clarion* that they were glad to see some progress from the Graduate Center administration on the issue, but they hope that there will be an actual long-term fix to the problem. Doctoral students believe their research time should be spent doing science research and not constantly monitoring, deciphering or reporting their pay problems.

"The portal treats the symptom but not the disease," Veline said. "The real solution is having one paycheck, one funding source."

Desiree Rios



# QC admin's weak response to racist attack

By ARI PAUL

The union has filed a grievance alleging that the Queens College (QC) administration's failure to properly investigate a racist and antisemitic incident on campus in January constitutes a violation of the contract's nondiscrimination language.

As *Clarion* first reported in the February 2022 issue, on January 6, a swastika and the words "KKK LIVES" were found carved onto a public bulletin board at QC's Delany Hall, which is home to the Africana studies department, the higher education access program SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge) and the Center for Ethnic, Racial and Religious Understanding (CERRU). The building itself is the first building on the campus to be named after a Black faculty member, a result of activism by Black, Jewish and Puerto Rican students, faculty and staff who pushed for a campus building to house programs that serve primarily BIPOC communities.

## NOT RANDOM

The attack at Queens College, a campus where PSC members have complained about various racist, Islamophobic and antisemitic incidents in the past, was not considered random. The graffiti was discovered on the first anniversary of the Capitol Hill insurrection, which involved various far-right

## Members see no 'real' solutions



Norka Blackman-Richards said the Queens College administration has not listened to faculty and staff concerns.

groups. Around the same time as the Delany incident, several historically Black colleges and universities experienced bomb threats, including at Morgan State University in Baltimore and Howard University in Washington, DC, as well as at CUNY's Borough of Manhattan Community College.

On February 22, a group of PSC members who work at Delany sent a letter to QC President Frank Wu, demanding, as the chapter put it in a statement, "facilitation for addressing racial trauma, [action] following the guidance and recommendations of Delany community leaders; a detailed timeline for the investigation

of the January 6 incident and [an] explanation of steps taken; human rights training for public safety personnel and enhanced protective measures at Delany, including improved lighting, panic buttons and swipe card entry; [and] a committee to develop an actionable zero-tolerance policy with oversight from

a collective that includes minoritized students, faculty and staff."

Wu responded in an email the next day (QC administration had issued several general emails to the Delany community since the incident). The PSC QC Chapter believes the administration's actions in response to the incident have been insufficient. There are 40 faculty and staff members working in the building, and as of this writing, only two have been interviewed about the incident, according to PSC QC Chapter Chair David Gerwin. The college also failed to interview a faculty member who received a death threat by phone, and President Wu has postponed two scheduled visits to Delany, Gerwin noted.

## UNHEARD CONCERNS

Norka Blackman-Richards, director of the college's SEEK Program, said that the workers based in Delany Hall have seen "no satisfactory solutions" from the administration. She added, "We feel gaslighted and unheard."

The PSC grievance filed on behalf of all faculty and staff working in Delany alleges that the administration violated Article 8 of the PSC-CUNY contract, which protects members from racial discrimination, as well as violated CUNY's own policies on workplace violence. The grievance cites an "improper investigation of and response to public safety

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# Judge: retirees do not have to pay premiums

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

In a win for the PSC and other municipal retirees, a New York Supreme Court judge has allowed retirees to stay on their current supplemental Medicare plan (GHI Senior Care for most retirees) at no cost, thus striking the \$200 monthly premium when they previously paid nothing.

The decision by New York State Supreme Court Judge Lyle Frank comes after a monthslong battle between municipal retirees, who have been protesting the move to the privatized municipal retiree health insurance, Medicare Advantage Plus plan (MA+). Retiree activists argued that the switch to MA+ could lead to higher costs, smaller networks and an inability to access current providers, according to the nonprofit news website *The City*.

## A LEGAL WIN

"It's absolutely a victory if it stands and it's really the result of significant pushback, not simply by PSC retirees, but municipal retirees across the city," PSC Retirees Chapter Chair Bill Friedheim told *Clarion*. "It's astonishing given the forces arrayed against us: two powerful health-care organizations that had the Medicare Advantage Plus contract, the Muni-

## PSC fights privatization of health benefits

pal Labor Committee and the City of New York's Office of Labor Relations – and all their lawyers."

The city has filed a notice to appeal the judge's ruling, and the organization that brought the lawsuit on behalf of retirees has filed a notice of counter appeal.

As a result of the judge's March 3 ruling, the NYC Office of Labor

Relations has stated on its website that the new MA+ plan will not be implemented on April 1 and that the opt-out deadline is no longer in effect.

The latest legal win comes after persistent activism by members in the PSC Retirees Chapter, including rallies, testimony to city officials, pleas to the city

council, mayor and the New York City comptroller and support for the lawsuit brought against the city, protesting the implementation of the MA+ plan. Some recent PSC Retirees Chapter meetings have engaged over 600 members.

Following the court ruling and a meeting with PSC representatives

**'It's absolutely a victory if it stands.'**



City Comptroller Brad Lander (right) urged Mayor Eric Adams (left) to withdraw the contract.

to discuss flaws in the proposed contract between the city and the "Alliance" of health insurance companies that administer the MA+ plan, newly elected City Comptroller Brad Lander wrote a letter to Mayor Eric Adams, stating that in light of the recent court decision, "We ask that the Office of Labor Relations strongly consider withdrawing its contract."

## AN 'INFERIOR' PLAN

The court case was filed by the NYC Organization of Public Service Retirees in September 2021 on behalf of a group of municipal retirees who contested the switch from their premium-free retiree health care benefits, which is a traditional Medicare plan with supplemental coverage paid for by the city, to what the petitioners called a "materially inferior Medicare Advantage Plan."

The decision to switch to the MA+ plan was the result of a 2018 New York City and Municipal Labor Committee (MLC) agreement aimed at protecting the Stabilization Fund, which pays for, among other things, PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund benefits. The agreement looked to find "savings" to mitigate skyrocketing health-care costs. However, switching to a private Medicare Advantage program for retirees was only one of eight options the parties agreed to consider in the 2018 agreement. As a member union of the MLC, the

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## MAKING THE CASE

## ND4C, a just and wise investment

By JAMES DAVIS

PSC President

*Editor's note: On February 7, PSC President James Davis and United University Professions President Fred Kowal testified before the New York State lawmakers in Albany, saying that while Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget included ambitious funding increases for CUNY and SUNY, it didn't go far enough. In his testimony below, Davis notes that the New Deal for CUNY, which would make CUNY free and increase full-time faculty and staff, is not just affordable, but fiscally necessary. (The testimony has been edited for print publication.)*

We are entering the third year of an international pandemic that continues to impact CUNY communities. Vaccines have lessened the pandemic's toll on New Yorkers, thankfully, but CUNY students were among those hardest hit by COVID early on in the pandemic. The low-income communities in which they live were disproportionately affected, and tragically so. They lost family members and jobs, and their connections to the campuses diminished as classes went remote. PSC members have worked tirelessly and skillfully to keep the university running, often without clear system-wide guidance from the CUNY administration, resulting in serious health and safety concerns and course cancellations that impede students' academic progress and leave adjunct faculty without income, and for some, without health insurance. Thank you all for standing by our side during this time.

CUNY students, faculty and staff have persevered during this pandemic, but the pandemic's effects on our university remain profound and destabilizing. Even today, instructors routinely hear from students coping with the death of a family member or friend.

## SEMESTER TRANSITION

Remote instruction, on the scale that we have experienced over the last two years, undermines engagement and jeopardizes student retention. Students without adequate space to study or dependable technology have really struggled. Many have not returned to classes.

We believe CUNY students are generally better served by in-person instruction, advising and counseling. Yet, some students are hesitant to return to in-person classes while COVID is still a threat. Other students who face work and family obligations, a lack of affordable, dependable childcare and long, costly commutes are asking for online alternatives to in-person courses. These and other factors have suppressed enrollment at many colleges.

CUNY's varying responses to low enrollment have left many PSC members concerned about their jobs and have also instilled worry for some adjuncts about their access to health insurance should their classes be canceled. We urge CUNY not to cancel classes. Doing so leaves adjunct faculty without expected income and undermines students' ability to complete credits they need to graduate on time.

It adds insult to injury when library and computer lab hours are cut because there



PSC President James Davis (right) with United University Professions President Fred Kowal (left) addressed the crowd of union members and students at the Brooklyn Bridge Budget March on March 6.

are not enough staff to keep them open. To reverse the current enrollment trend and to continue to provide a high-quality education, we must furnish the services students deserve and need in traumatic times. CUNY students have a distinctive profile:

- Over 80% of incoming CUNY undergraduates are New York City high school graduates.
- Half of CUNY students come from households with annual incomes below \$30,000 and 36% have reported food insecurity.
- 80% are people of color.
- 44% are in the first generation of their families to attend college.
- 13% are supporting children.
- 35% are foreign-born.

Investment in CUNY students, faculty, staff and the communities that we serve will pay dividends for the state. According to a March 2021 report from the Office of the New York City Comptroller, tax dollars for CUNY are a wise investment:

- Nearly 80% of CUNY graduates stay in New York.
- CUNY graduates working in New York State earned a combined \$57 billion annually (\$67,000 on average) in 2019, \$28.6 billion more than they would have earned without a post-secondary degree.
- CUNY graduates working in New York State paid an estimated \$4.2 billion in state income taxes in 2019.
- CUNY graduates represent 10% of the private workforce in New York State.

In 2020, the Brookings Institution listed 12 CUNY campuses among the top colleges in the nation that propelled their students

toward the greatest upward mobility into the middle class.

In December 2021, a thousand PSC members, CUNY students, community allies and elected officials took to the streets of Queens, marching from LaGuardia Community College to the CUNY School of Law to declare that 2022 is the year for a New Deal for CUNY.

We knew at that march, as we know now, that after years of budgets that did not do justice to CUNY's Black and brown students, low-income communities and overburdened workers, there is wind at the back of the state's great institutions of public higher education. The fiscal crisis of the last two years has receded and New York has a strong budget surplus. Governor Hochul is acting decisively to begin reversing the years of austerity funding for CUNY, the state's most powerful force for economic mobility for low-income New Yorkers, immigrants and students of color.

The governor has committed to an increase of \$1.5 billion in new funding for CUNY and SUNY over the next five years. She has proposed new investments in full-time faculty, opportunity programs and childcare facilities. Her capital budget plan recognizes the desperate need for funding to repair or replace CUNY buildings, making them sustainable and safe places in which to work and learn. These increases, which in some cases represent the largest investments in more than a decade, are essential. We applaud them. We also recognize that the chairs and members of these committees have advocated for years for reforms and

investments that appear in this Executive Budget. Notable investments in CUNY in the proposed budget include:

- Approximately \$120 million in new programmatic and related funding:
  - \$53 million for 540 new full-time faculty
  - \$59.6 million for closing the TAP gap, two years sooner than previously planned
  - \$3.4 million for the SEEK Program
  - \$4.8 million for the expansion of child-care centers (\$3.6 million for senior colleges and \$1.2 million for community colleges)
- Expansion of the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP).
  - \$150 million for CUNY and SUNY to provide support for part-time students
  - \$5 million to restore TAP for incarcerated individuals
- \$3.5 million for the School of Labor and Urban Studies, stabilizing executive funding for the newest CUNY school
- Holding community colleges harmless for enrollment declines. The budget prevents a \$35 million reduction in base aid.

Many of the investments outlined in the Executive Budget align with the priorities identified in the New Deal for CUNY (S4461/A5843). This legislation, supported by the CUNY Rising Alliance and introduced by Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assembly Member Karines Reyes, is a \$1.7 billion, five-year framework for reversing decades of disinvestment in CUNY.

The bill, which is endorsed by some of New York's most prominent labor leaders and the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus, currently has 65 legislative cosponsors. It seeks to restore CUNY as a tuition-free institution for undergraduates. It would also set minimum staff-to-student

## The numbers don't lie: fund CUNY



ratios for full-time faculty, academic advisors and mental health counselors, establish pay parity for adjunct faculty and rebuild CUNY's aging infrastructure.

The PSC calls on the legislature to pass the New Deal for CUNY, and we urge you to enact a final budget that will begin to fund the New Deal in fiscal year 2023. To that end, we request that you improve upon the Executive Budget's investment in CUNY in the following ways:

- Provide an additional \$253.9 million in operating aid from the legislature.
  - \$39.1 million for CUNY community colleges to make 2018–2019 the reference year in the hold harmless provision (\$20.7 million) and to fund a \$300 per-FTE base aid increase (\$18.4 million)
  - \$78.9 million to hire 171 mental health counselors and 372 academic advisors
  - \$135.9 million to hire an additional 1,385 full-time faculty (for a total of 1,925, including the 540 new full-time lines provided in the Executive Budget)
- Pass the New Deal for CUNY (S4461/A5843)
  - Establish the minimum ratio of full-time faculty to students, by increasing it to 65:1,000 by year five of the governor's plan for CUNY and SUNY.
  - Establish the minimum ratios of 1:1,000 mental health counselors to students and 1:250 academic advisors to students.
  - Commit to an undergraduate first dollar tuition-free model at all CUNY colleges.
    - For \$284 million, New York State can make CUNY community colleges free this year.
    - ND4C would make all CUNY fully free in year two.

Between 1990 and 2021, per-full-time-equivalent (FTE) student state operating aid to CUNY senior colleges declined 38% when adjusted for inflation. Since 2008, it declined 18%. The result has been rising tuition, diminished facilities, unmanageable caseloads for mental health counselors and unwieldy workloads for academic advisors, a two-tiered labor system that depends on underpaid adjunct faculty and a severe shortage of full-time faculty.

### CUNY MISSION

That CUNY remains such a powerful source of knowledge creation, opportunity and economic mobility during this era of disinvestment is a testament to our faculty, staff and students. PSC members feel a deep commitment to CUNY's mission to serve "the whole people" of New York. CUNY students are driven to succeed.

We sincerely appreciate the attention public higher education received in Governor



New York State Senator Andrew Gounardes is a coauthor of the ND4C bill in the State Senate.

Hochul's Executive Budget. Her five-year plan, beginning with this budget, is a springboard toward fulfilling the New Deal for CUNY. Now, the CUNY community needs the legislature to seize this unique political moment to get us to the finish line and realize the New Deal for CUNY.

**CUNY NEEDS MORE FACULTY.** Increase the full-time faculty to student ratio of 65:1,000 and professionalize adjunct pay at both the senior and community colleges. This would allow CUNY to hire 5,774 new full-time faculty, which would cost for fiscal year 2023 an increase to the Executive Budget by \$135 million and, for the five-year phase in, the total cost would be \$542 million.

Imagine a university with more than 253,000 students and over 11,000 full-time faculty. That was CUNY in 1975. In contrast, in 2020, there were almost 4,000 fewer full-time faculty with even more students. Too much of the teaching responsibility now falls on the shoulders of roughly 12,000 adjunct faculty, who, as of last Spring, teach almost 60% of undergraduate courses. This budget is an opportunity to challenge the precariousness that prevails in higher education to the detriment of students and faculty alike.

Hiring new full-time faculty is also a matter of racial justice. A report by the CUNY University Faculty Senate explains that stu-

dents of color have less access to full-time faculty than white students across New York State's public senior colleges: "In 2003, both CUNY and SUNY maintained overall ratios of 43 full-time faculty members to 1,000 full-time-equivalent students in the four-year colleges, a number already below national norms for public universities. By 2019, the ratio at SUNY had increased to 49, while the ratio at CUNY dropped to 34."

Public four-year colleges that serve significant proportions of Black and brown students have lower ratios of full-time faculty to students than their counterpart colleges serving student bodies that are predominantly white. This trend exists in both systems, but it disproportionately affects CUNY.

**CUNY STUDENTS NEED MORE PROFESSIONAL STAFF, ADVISORS AND MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELORS.** Hire 171 additional mental health counselors and 372 academic advisors. (Cost for fiscal year 2023: \$78.9 million. Total cost for five-year phase in: \$78.9 million.)

Last year's \$1 million appropriation from the legislature for mental health counselors was welcome, but students need more permanent access to counselors. Unfortunately, the Executive Budget provided no new funding specifically for counselors or advisors. CUNY needs our legislators to address this need that cannot wait another year.

CUNY students, more than many others, need advisors to help them navigate the labyrinth that is a large university system, as many are the first in their family to attend college. Academic advisors support and expand students' knowledge in their fields of study, providing essential guidance to keep them on track toward a timely graduation. Yet on some campuses, advisors have caseloads of more than 1,000 students.

Our society's mental health crisis is not confined to colleges, but CUNY students have been at the center of the pandemic. CUNY's student-to-mental health counselor ratio is 2,700:1, far worse than the national recommendation of 1,000:1.3. Currently, CUNY is patching together telehealth services with many part-time counselors, also funded with federal pandemic relief, because it does not have an adequate baseline of funds to hire permanent counselors. We urge you to address these gaps in the Executive Budget by providing funding for 171 mental health counselors and 372 academic advisors.

**MAKE CUNY FREE AGAIN.** Eliminate undergraduate tuition and fees at senior and community colleges. (Cost for fiscal year 2023: \$284 million in order for the state to make CUNY community colleges free. Total cost for five-year phase in: \$1.1 billion.)

New York's Tuition Assistance Program (TAP) is among the largest state financial aid programs in the nation, benefiting both private and public college students. Roughly 60% of CUNY students receive Federal Pell Grants, and a very small percentage of CUNY students qualify for New York's last-dollar Excelsior Scholarship.

The state's funding model for public higher education has depended on rising tuition, robust financial aid and essentially flat operating support. Lawmakers and advocates have worked to close the gaps in the financial aid system, but our university systems have been starved of resources under the current model, while tuition has increased and many families live with the financial burden of student debt. New York's free-tuition program, Excelsior, is a last-dollar scholarship that comes with significant strings attached.

There is a better way. New York should commit to a first dollar tuition-free model at all CUNY colleges. It is worth noting that every one of CUNY's 13 Nobel laureates were alumni who attended CUNY tuition-free.

Starting with the 2023–2024 academic year, (fiscal year 2024), the New Deal for CUNY mandates the elimination of all tuition and fees for in-state undergraduate students with time frames stipulated for degree completion. CUNY would receive full reimbursement for the tuition amounts.

Freed of the burden of tuition, CUNY students collectively would have more than \$1 billion of additional spending power to boost the economy. Funding public higher education is not only the ethical thing to do, it is a wise fiscal investment of resources. If a free CUNY was good enough for the majority white population in our university's first century, surely it is good enough for the students of color who are the majority of our population today.

**INVEST IN THE CAPITAL BUDGET TO FUND BUILDING REPAIRS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.** Invest in repairs and ensure a safe working and learning environment. (Total cost for five-year phase in: \$5.6 billion.)

Decades of underinvestment led to deteriorated buildings. The result is overcrowding on many campuses, inadequate heating, cooling and ventilation, leaky roofs, broken plumbing, dangerous pavements, failure to replace major electrical components and other hazards. All of this was unacceptable before COVID, but in a pandemic, updated and working ventilation systems are a matter of life and death.

Investing in sustainable facilities will have the added benefits of mitigating climate change and creating high-paying construction jobs.

Fiscal and political circumstances have changed for CUNY. For too long, the PSC fought against cuts in the Executive Budget that in some years were draconian. This is the year to invest in CUNY, and it doesn't come a minute too soon for our beloved university and our state.

CUNY students are worthy of a transformative investment in their futures. PSC members deserve a vibrant, safe and healthy workplace. Laborers in the construction industry need the jobs that long-delayed capital investments in CUNY can bring. And the people of New York are worthy of a renewed commitment to the public good.

Support the People's University and fund a New Deal for CUNY now.



New York State Assembly Member Karines Reyes is a coauthor of the ND4C State Assembly bill.



# Protecting member health at CCNY

By CLARION STAFF

Carlos Parker, the assistant director of admissions at City College (CCNY) and one of the PSC Environmental Health and Safety coordinators, grew up on the CCNY campus. His mother worked in the Financial Accounting Office at the college and cut checks for the campus community; his aunt was an accountant in the Bursar's Office; his stepfather was the assistant registrar. For Parker, a City College graduate, the school has always been a second home. He spent many childhood summers on campus while his mother worked. After eating lunch, he would often take a nap under his mother's desk.

CCNY administration's uneven response to the pandemic inspired Parker to become more active in the union. He witnessed firsthand how members' health and safety were threatened for "money and convenience" and how the CCNY administration dismissed urgent concerns. The last two years have transformed Parker from a "passive" colleague with personal health and safety concerns to a union activist with "laser-like focus."

## WORKPLACE HAZARDS

He joined the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Committee in June 2021 and quickly rose to a leadership role, becoming a watchdog coordinator by October of that year. In January 2022, he earned an OSHA 10 certification after completing training in common health and safety hazards on the job, and he is continuing his health and safety education to better protect himself and his colleagues.

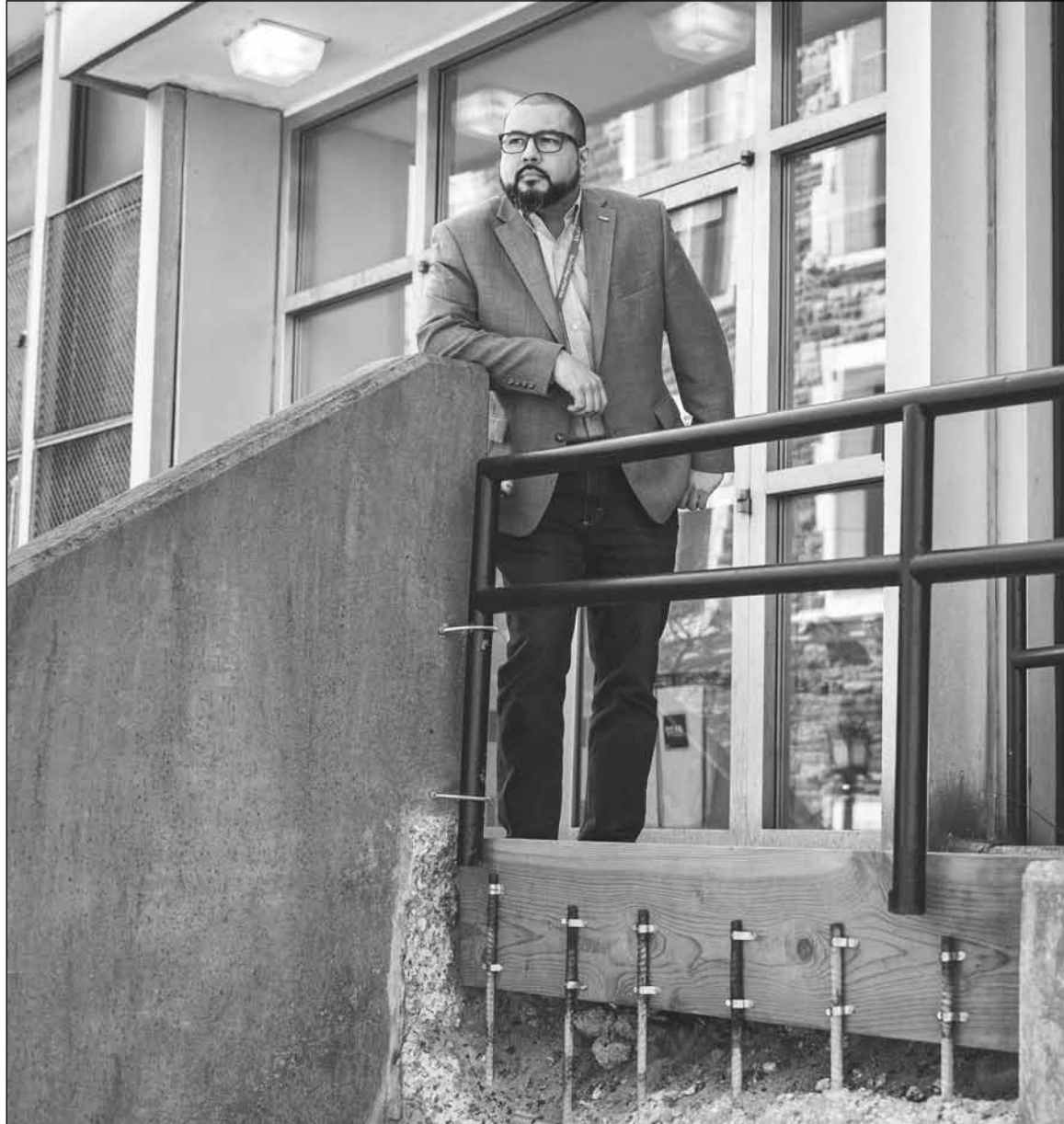
Parker spoke to *Clarion's* Shomial Ahmad about his campus work around health and safety issues.

**Why did you decide to become more active in the union, and why did you specifically choose the PSC Environmental Health and Safety Committee?**

Like other watershed moments in history, COVID-19 has changed our lives forever. How we treat each other during these times defines us. I've seen how people can come together in support of one another, but I've also seen the indignity of people's worth quantified in mere economic terms.

At the beginning of the pandemic, I witnessed in disbelief how some members of my own campus community were being forced to work in person during the height of the pandemic and grieved the death of a close HEO colleague who died from complications from COVID-19 in May 2020. He was required to work in person for some days during that time. I made a conscious decision that from that point on that I would get more involved in union matters in general and health and safety issues, in particular. This naturally led me to the very active and highly successful PSC Environmental Health and Safety Watchdogs.

## Parker: from union member to PSC activist



Carlos Parker, a PSC Environmental Health and Safety coordinator, stands on a restored pedestrian ramp at CCNY, which was fixed after chapter pressure.

City College is one of the only CUNY campuses where there is significant room-by-room ventilation data. As Watchdogs have pointed out, members work in rooms and not in entire buildings. While the proper ventilation of a building is very important, knowing that rooms are adequately ventilated is crucial to the return of in-person work. Describe the process of getting that level of detail and how you have made it available for members.

Room-level ventilation data at CCNY is not something that I, or even the union, can take credit for. In this way we were a bit lucky to have some higher-level officials that genuinely wanted to be as helpful and transparent as possible. Of course, we should not have to feel "lucky" to have this information, as it should be standard information provided to all employees at all institutions.

Unfortunately, I have to speak about this helpfulness and transparency in the past tense. Following CUNY's lead, these same people have now taken an adversarial stance toward our health and safety efforts. CUNY Central feels threatened by the success and militancy of the PSC

Health and Safety Watchdogs across the university and now requires us to fight for every bit of information.

## PUBLIC DATA

The CCNY ventilation data was once available on the college's website and was forced down [from the site] by CUNY Central. The Watchdogs had to file FOIL requests to get that once-public data and now we, the CCNY chapter of the Health and Safety Watchdogs, make it available online to our campus community. [The link is [tinyurl.com/CCNY-health-safety](https://tinyurl.com/CCNY-health-safety).] Sadly, it seems like we've entered a new phase of PSC-campus administration relations because none of the campus leaders, as far as I can see, have the political will to actually lead and stand up to CUNY.

**As CUNY returns to a more in-person presence on campus, what do you think all PSC members should be aware of in relation to health and safety issues on their campuses and what can they do about it?**

Everyone, including PSC members, needs to be aware that they

have a legal right to work in a safe and healthy environment, enshrined by the general duty clause of the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970. They also need to be aware that it is the responsibility of the employer to provide that safe and healthy environment. However, this often does not come without a fight. We, as union members, have to be prepared for management pushback.

## Organizing for the 'collective good'

It starts with being conscious of your work environment and speaking up for yourself or for others, especially if something is making you physically or mentally sick. Not everyone is in a position where they can be assertive about these issues, but members shouldn't remain silent.

Internalizing workplace problems, or not speaking about them – whether it is health and safety, bullying, workplace violence, sexual harassment, etc. – is not good for your health. Seek out those within the union who are in a position to help. We are all in this fight together and only through constant vigilance and swift collective action can we remain

successful against these persistent and pernicious issues.

**What have you learned from other PSC chapters and their issues around health and safety?**

While all PSC chapters face a common struggle, each campus naturally has unique challenges. There is different architecture, age of infrastructure, level of cooperation from administration and union activism. I've learned that change comes from being persistent and remaining steadfast in the face of backlash from the administration.

## CHAPTER CAMPAIGNS

The Queens College PSC Chapter is a great example of what can be accomplished. They led the way with using FOIL as a means of getting more ventilation information, and the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs followed suit with FOIL requests for other campuses.

Freya Pritchard, professor of mathematics and computer science at York College (highlighted in the February 2022 issue of *Clarion*) has shown incredible strength and courage in not backing down, despite being targeted and reprimanded by the York administration. Stories of retaliation abound throughout CUNY. To me, these union-busting attempts are a sign of desperation. Campus administrations have survived and thrived on our fear for far too long, and they are now realizing that we are no longer fearful and will stand up for our rights.

**What have you learned about fellowship among colleagues, especially in a time of isolation during a pandemic? Has your increased union involvement taught you some lessons about working for the collective good?**

I believe in the general goodness of people and the natural desire to want to help each other. You see it all the time during natural disasters and times of crisis; people rally in support of those in need.

COVID-19 has been no different. Most of us have become closer in making the best of a very difficult situation. In my view, it is the systems under which people operate that corrupt that natural desire.

The "collective good" that the union represents is in constant battle with the "divide-and-conquer" CUNY workplace, a microcosm of the larger socioeconomic system, which dictates a perennial state of fierce competition against one another for what is largely just material "success" and superficial status.

I, like many others, come from a background conditioned by the "rugged individualism" that defines our society. My work with the union and my recent experiences throughout this pandemic have taught me that there is a better way to do things, a way that is democratic and that benefits us all, collectively. That is the goal that we must constantly work toward.

Desiree Rios



# Urging DOE, CUNY coordination

By ARI PAUL

The New York City Department of Education (DOE) and CUNY should work more closely together to ensure that the city's graduating seniors are best prepared for college, city council members said at a February 25 Committee on Higher Education hearing. (See Council support for ND4C.) PSC leaders argued that the university has gradually diminished remedial programs for both CUNY students and the PSC members who teach in these programs.

"Remediation programs, such as CUNY Start and the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP), are essential to students' ability to gain the vital skills to succeed in college and to graduate," said PSC President James Davis in a written testimony submitted to the committee. Davis added that a 2018 study by CUNY showed that "the number of students who need remediation is significant. Approximately 80% of New York City public high school graduates enter CUNY's community colleges in need of remediation."

## COVID CHANGES

Davis, who also spoke at the hearing, noted that the pandemic has surely increased this need.

"Every semester, CUNY welcomes new students with high school diplomas or the equivalent who lack some of the academic skills needed to succeed in credit-bearing college classes. For students with major remedial needs, CUNY has established pre-matriculation programs that provide full-time academic support and immersive skills development curricula," Davis said. "Over time the process by which students are placed in programs has changed, shifting students away from a more rigorous academic experience to a lesser one. Additionally, in the past, our members who taught these courses were full-time faculty and now, many are part-time

## Council focuses on CUNY remedial programs



PSC Legislative Coordinator Tiffany Brown (right) speaks to Rita Joseph (left), the chair of the City Council Committee on Education.

continuing education teachers, paid hourly or on a contract basis. This shift exacerbates wage disparities at the university and deprofessionalizes the work, which is unfair to students and our members."

The union has worked to address the deprofessionalization of certain PSC titles. In the 2010-2017 PSC-CUNY contract agreement, ratified in the summer of 2016, many CUNY CLIP and CUNY Start instructors were converted from part-time workers to full-time instructors, *Clarion* reported in March 2017. But some titles within

these programs remain part-time, explained Faye Moore, the union's director of contract enforcement.

## Imagining a K-16 system

Lorraine Cohen, professor of sociology at LaGuardia Community College, told the council members that CUNY is shifting more students who require language and skills development into continuing education programs, noting in her submitted testimony that "this policy is conveniently cheaper than paying full-time faculty and adjuncts from the credit-bearing academic departments."

"Continuing Education Teachers, many of whom are part-time, are paid much less than academic faculty and have fewer benefits and less job security," she said. "This is yet another example of exploiting the part-time labor force."

## A SMOOTH TRANSITION

PSC Treasurer Felicia Wharton, who has also taught math at the Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center to students working on attaining their high school diplomas, told the panel, "There is no one-size-fits-all technique to assist underpre-

pared students to succeed. As the population of learners changes, we have to be innovative with new approaches to make a difference."

City Council members at the hearing agreed that the DOE and CUNY should work more closely together to help the city's graduating seniors make a smoother transition into college life and academics at CUNY. Some members even envisioned a system that would be more integrated, like a K-16 system. In fact, the new chair of the Committee on Higher Education, Eric Dinowitz, a former DOE teacher and a United Federation of Teachers activist, told *Clarion* in February that he didn't view elementary and college education as siloed, but rather envisioned "a continuum of support and services."

## NEEDED PIPELINE

"There has to be a pipeline," said Rita Joseph, the chair of the Council's Committee on Education. We need to work together to make sure that K-12 and higher education has a connection [and] that there is no disconnect."

Joseph said that students who attend New York City public schools and go on to CUNY "should not be spending most of their time taking remedial classes if we're doing our part from the DOE end," because "they should be able to accelerate, succeed and move on to the next level."

"It should not take seven years to get an associate's degree," Joseph said. "There should never be a disconnect between education and higher education and even youth services. All those programs should go hand-in-hand."

"There are significant needs for robust support in the CUNY system," Dinowitz said, adding that a more holistic approach with the DOE and CUNY working closely together would recognize "that CUNY does not exist in isolation."

*Shomial Ahmad contributed to the reporting of this story.*

## Weak response to racist attack at Queens

Continued from page 5

complaints," and demands that the administration implement an "immediate and thorough investigation and report to the affected employees and all other[s] [to] make whole relief."

## FEELING UNSAFE

"There's no reason for several iterations of letters from the president's office," said Soribel Genao, an associate professor in the department of educational and community programs at Queens College. "We didn't get the attention we needed. There is now a lack of safety. In our department, we have asked our secretaries about how they feel, because they are women of color. [The administration should] at least be

mindful about how we feel as Black and brown people. There should have been more empathy."

The union chapter noted that there is no evidence of a police report being filed in response to the incident. "Why not show us the report?" asked Genao.

"What happened [at] Queens College and Delany Hall is not only a Queens issue," said Lawrence Johnson, a cochair of the union's Anti-Racism Committee. "Generally speaking, reports of harassment of students, staff and faculty are actually quite normal. What makes the incident at Queens distinct is that [members] have been effective at bringing attention to it in ways that

victims of such incidents are often too beleaguered to do, especially staff members who fear retaliation from their superiors."

Johnson, an assistant professor of sociology at Brooklyn College, said

## Members press for a thorough investigation.

that the incident should inspire the "development of a CUNY Central anti-racist response team, composed of faculty, staff and students so that these situations are not isolated and institutional responses are therefore not limited to the judgment of individual administrators."

Johnson said that both the Queens College and CUNY Central administrations' lackluster response to the incident was evidence that there

must be an ongoing, CUNY-wide anti-racist taskforce. He suggested that there be "annual meetings between anti-racist leaders on campus, administration and PSC leaders to discuss and plan ongoing initiatives, strategies and implementation to create a safer environment for all the CUNY community."

For Gerwin, a professor of secondary education and youth services at the college, the perceived half-heartedness of the administration's investigation isn't just a contractual issue, but a sign that President Frank Wu is out of touch with faculty, staff and students on his campus.

"What he thinks is happening in his mind and what's happening on the ground are completely different," Gerwin said. "He doesn't have any sense of what's happening."



PSCers are united against hate.

Art Paul



# Stick a fork in plastics at CUNY

By CLARION STAFF

Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation on November 20 that, according to her office, would require “local solid waste management plans [to] make efforts to increase waste diversion, including by recycling and composting and encouraging the elimination of the use of certain single-use plastic items at State University of New York and City University of New York campuses.”

For the union’s Environmental Justice Working Group (EJWG), this is a major opportunity to tackle the problem of petroleum products, as most plastics are made from fossil fuels.

## SUSTAINABILITY EFFORTS

“Along with policies adopted by the CUNY Trustees, the state legislation requires our input. Faculty, staff and students [need to] develop a campus-by-campus plan to minimize single-use plastics. So let’s dive in,”



Governor Kathy Hochul signed legislation tackling single-use plastics at SUNY and CUNY.

said Nancy Romer, a member of the EJWG. “The CUNY Campus Sustainability Councils are recruiting faculty, staff and students to help develop proposals for each campus. Now is

the time to jump in to create the strongest elimination plan as possible, dramatically limiting plastic consumption on your campus, from food service to laboratories.”

Romer, a professor emerita of psychology at Brooklyn College, said members who are interested in getting involved in this effort should contact their chapter chair or email [ClimateJusticePSC@gmail.com](mailto:ClimateJusticePSC@gmail.com).

## A BETTER CLIMATE

“As well, the EJWG is working on city, state and federal climate legislation that will have an impact on the health and safety of our communities and the planet,” Romer said. “We are engaged in a number of coalitions [that are] lobbying, demonstrating, phone calling and using social media.”

Romer added, “We are also working on getting all the financial institutions we interact with to divest their holdings from fossil fuels: TIAA, the New York City Teachers Retirement System, New York State Teachers Retirement System, New York State Common Retirement Fund and the CUNY Trustees.”

# Counselors and advisors vital to CUNY

Continued from page 2

A union statement said that the New Deal for CUNY legislation “would result in \$79 million in new funding for CUNY, specifically to hire new academic advisors and mental health counselors” and impose “legally-mandated minimum staff-to-student ratios.” The legislation adds that “caseloads for advisors and counselors are outrageously high,” with some workers expected to meet with 128 [students] in a single week, in addition to other work duties.

## MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING

As state lawmakers were in the final stages of the budget negotiations with the governor, the PSC pushed for the inclusion of more mental health and academic advisors in CUNY’s budget allocation. And many PSC members are sharing stories of how bad the situation is. Some say that mental health and advising staff are stretched so thin that they don’t have time to use the bathroom, let alone devote enough time to cases. Many counselors have told the union about students who are dealing with highly traumatic issues, and the university does not have enough staff to serve these students. The PSC is doing everything it can to ensure that there’s funding for this increased hiring.

Lynn Kaplan, associate director at the Baruch College Counseling Center, noted that with only four full-time, permanent mental health counselors, the center must seek new temporary and part-time workers to fill in the gaps. “This puts us in the position of constantly recruiting, hiring, onboarding and training new counselors and it is not a sustainable model to support Baruch students suffering from mental health issues,” she said. “Based on a recent student survey that we con-

ducted in Spring 2021, we know that about 45% of Baruch students who responded to the survey suffer from major to moderate depression, 37% met criteria for anxiety disorder and 13% reported suicidal ideation over the past year.”

Kaplan believes that the current staffing levels simply cannot address these problems. “Without enough staff, we are put in the position of referring out many students for mental health support,” she said. “This is not an effective solution because many students don’t have insurance; many students cannot use their insurance due to mental health stigma. And because we are in a mental health crisis, many outpatient clinics are full and don’t have any openings. We simply don’t have the staffing to sufficiently meet the growing mental health needs of the Baruch students.”

Victoria O’Shea, an ASAP student advisor at Queensborough Community College, recalled how in October she tried to get immediate counseling for two students who had reported being sexually assaulted. O’Shea was informed by the director of counseling that all the campus counselors were booked solid until the end of the Fall semester.

## CRISIS COUNSELING

“Since both students had insurance and were able to use it, I worked with them to find appropriate referrals,” O’Shea said. “However, given the influx of people needing counseling, this too proved difficult. One student was unable to find a therapist to help her work through her trauma.”

O’Shea told *Clarion* about another student who was suicidal and whose insurance (through her parents) did not cover mental health counseling. “Her only option was

to get counseling secretly through the college,” O’Shea said. “I again contacted our director of counseling and she stated that she was willing to work outside of her hours in order to assist this student.”

For O’Shea, this is a dire situation.

## Counselors guide students through crisis.

“Without having enough staff, such as advisors and counselors on our campuses, not only are we doing a disservice to our students – and CUNY is losing money – we are also putting lives in jeopardy,” she said.

Brett Costello, a junior majoring in biology at Hunter College, said that as a student on the autism spectrum, mental health services are as essential to his education as his classes. “There are probably quite a few students at CUNY that

have autism,” he said. “It’s like a different way of thinking if you’re autistic. I think we would have better academic outcomes if we can get some of these students the help they need.”

## NEEDED RESOURCES

According to CUNY advocates, stories like these are why the State Legislature must pass the New Deal for CUNY and create funds for more advisors and counselors. Cory Provost, the interim chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate, spoke about the need for these services at a recent forum, stating that they’re especially needed now more than ever as many students transition back to in-person education.

“What the pandemic has revealed [is that] so many people need aid, so many people need resources,” he said. “Having access to mental health counselors is going to be critical.”



Lynn Kaplan, associate director at the Baruch College Counseling Center, said current staffing levels don’t meet students’ needs.

# Retirees

Continued from page 5

PSC has opposed the privatization of retiree Medicare from the beginning and is encouraging the MLC to look at some of the other options for health-care cost savings, such as self-insurance, cooperative prescription drug purchasing and reductions in hospitalization costs. Ultimately, the PSC believes that the long-term answer to out-of-control health-care costs is national single-payer health care.

## NO PREMIUMS

The MA+ plan would be run by an “Alliance” of private health insurers, EmblemHealth and Empire BlueCross BlueShield. Before the judge’s latest order, retirees would have had to opt out of the MA+ plan and pay a \$191 per month premium if they elected to stay on GHI, which is the primary supplementary health insurer for most municipal retirees. (*Clarion* has extensively covered the developing story in recent issues.)

If the judge’s ruling stands, retirees will not have to pay premiums in order to stay on their current plan, up to a certain cap. (The current GHI premium of \$191.57 per month is nowhere near the current monthly cap, which is over \$750.) If the judge’s ruling is upheld on appeal, retirees will have three months after the MA+ implementation date to move back to their previous plan. Also under the judge’s current ruling, the city can decide not to offer the GHI Senior Care as an option to municipal retirees.

## LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS

The union and the PSC Retirees Chapter are monitoring developments in the case and will respond accordingly.

PSC President James Davis said in an email to members, “Although the outcome is still unclear, I would like to congratulate all PSC retirees and extend thanks to our Retirees Chapter for their persistent advocacy, which was essential in bringing us to this point.”

To find out the latest developments in retiree health care, go to [www.psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare](http://www.psc-cuny.org/whats-happening-retiree-healthcare).

# Corrections

The story “Disciplined for protecting fellow workers” in the February 2022 issue of *Clarion* states that Freya Pritchard, a mathematics professor at York College, was “disciplined” when she received a “letter of guidance” from the administration. This type of letter she received, however, is not a form of discipline.

The story “CUNY cutting CETs” in the December 2021 issue of *Clarion* said, “members at The English Language Center (TELC) at LaGuardia Community College have had to fight back against draconian cuts.” These members were adjunct instructors, not continuing education teachers (CETs).



# Building statewide power for PSC

Continued from page 3

ND4C campaign a top priority. While the PSC does not yet know the final outcome of the state budget or whether the state will get as far as enacting ND4C legislation this year, the PSC does know that the crisis at CUNY is now getting the fiscal and public attention it deserves. Consequently, NYS public higher education institutions stand to see better funding in the final budget than they have seen in decades.

Six years ago, the PSC, along with a handful of other community organizations and unions, began to build the citywide coalition, CUNY Rising Alliance, which aims to secure the future of the City University of New York. With decades of underinvestment in the institution that has historically educated so many of New York's poor and working families, Black and brown students and immigrants, the decimation of CUNY has become unconscionable, unsustainable and intolerable.

By helping form the CUNY Rising Alliance, the PSC broadened its reach and made greater inroads into transforming CUNY and setting ourselves up to make major gains in the short and long run. CUNY needed to become a crucial and impassioned issue to constituents beyond the university's most immediate stakeholders. Other union members who attend CUNY, alumni, lawmakers and local leaders have been brought into the fold, so that activists, along with the PSC, can all advocate together to truly make CUNY the People's University. It now needs to be treated and funded as such.

## MASS MEETING

In 2016, CRA held an inaugural mass meeting with hundreds of students, union members (not just from the PSC) and community groups. They assembled for a march and mass meeting in a church in Midtown Manhattan. Over the next few years, with campus town halls, rallies, meetings, sign-on letters and press conferences, CRA attracted CUNY students and allies with the aim of sustaining the active participation across a range of organizations representing the people of New York City.

New York Communities for Change (NYCC), a community-based social justice organization, played an important structural role, helping to house and provide political and strategic direction for CUNY Rising Alliance. Monthly meetings of group leaders became the forum for collaboration, and by February 2020, CRA often had more than 30 people representing different groups who attended monthly meetings. Over time, it also became clear that in addition to one CRA staff person, student organizers and a second full-time staff member were needed to fully reach CRA's potential. This was achieved through sustained organizational support from NYCC and steady financial support from the PSC and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).

The CUNY Rising Alliance understood from the beginning the need to



Remysell Salas, the campaign director of CUNY Rising Alliance, spoke at a December rally advocating for full CUNY funding.

engage in struggle. Some campaigns were defensive, such as the effort to override then-Governor Andrew Cuomo's intention to cut CUNY's state support by \$485 million and shift its fiscal obligation to the city. CRA and PSC, joined by other groups and individuals, managed to defeat that effort.

Other campaigns were offensive, such as the emphasis on what was needed to ensure *quality* education: a greater investment in ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) that provides free transportation, support services and laptops for every student. A return to free tuition is a cornerstone of CRA's campaign to transform state and city funding for CUNY. The historic examples of New York City students fighting for increased access to higher education – from the expansion of CUNY during the Great Depression to the fight for open admissions in the 1970s – helped to revive the struggle for a tuition-free CUNY.

## VACUOUS PROMISE

But now, as in the 1960s and 1970s, access devoid of investment in quality education, is a vacuous promise. It was on this basis that the campaign to give *all* students the resources currently available only to those in ASAP, became a part of CRA's organizing agenda. Just as in earlier decades, students continue to need a more diverse faculty and a more inclusive curriculum, as well as the all-around supports that can, at least in part, be achieved by small classes and fully staffed colleges.

As in any coalition, groups come with different priorities and varying levels of commitment. Consequently, there are ebbs and flows to participation. Before COVID, there was steady participation from community organizations and unions; during the pandemic, there was a slow but steady rise in student participation. Inevitably, while activists coalesced around funding for CUNY, different organizations were comfortable with different language and tactics.

COVID made it difficult for all community groups, unions and coalitions to do their in-person organizing work. Groups hunkered down to survive in order to protect and help members and communities recover from loss and devastation. Eventually, along with the shock and trauma that people experienced during the pandemic, new kinds of community building and coalitions emerged. In the midst of COVID and ahead of the release of the 2021 state budget last year, the PSC and CRA joined the campaign to tax the wealthiest New Yorkers and worked closely with another alliance, Invest in Our New York.

Beginning in the winter of 2020, the first year of the pandemic, all of this new online organizing led to an astounding number of allies and CUNY students, who attended online zoom "actions," town halls and meetings, as a growing coalition was built to campaign for a budget in support of a New Deal for CUNY.

In the fall of 2020, while this ambitious piece of legislation was being drafted and legislative sponsors were identified, groups in the CUNY Rising Alliance and the PSC Committee on Legislation shared spreadsheets tracking legislators' support and met virtually with State Assembly members and senators to publicize the legislation and build sponsorship.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Together, activists met virtually with assembly members and senators to publicize the legislation and build sponsorship. In fall 2021, a dozen New York state labor unions sent a letter to the governor, the assembly speaker and senate majority leader, supporting investment in CUNY. The American Federation of Teachers' student vaccination grant that the PSC received and CRA implemented drew more than 7,000 students to CRA to learn about ND4C, join CRA actions and enter laptop raffle drawings. As significant as the work inside CRA was, what was more impressive was

that member groups were launching ND4C efforts within their own organizations.

Year after year, NYPIRG planned scores of highly organized legislative meetings that included students, faculty and staff. In 2022, Young Invincibles brought students to a "Students Take Albany Day" and met with legislators about ND4C and formed a "Students Rising" program to

train activists using ND4C as their main initiative. Young Democratic Socialists of America (YDSA) joined CRA as a member organization after the New York City chapter of DSA voted to make ND4C one of its main New York City priorities. They proceeded to hold town halls, design attractive materials and set up tables outside many CUNY colleges.

In March 2022, DSA also organized its own trip to Albany, where members told their stories to legislators. These independent events reinforced the campaign efforts of CRA and the PSC. The work of member organizations ran parallel and often in tandem with the work of the PSC's Legislative

Committee, whose members, leaders and PSC staff worked tirelessly to strengthen relationships with legislators, by running local district "visits," making city and state endorsement recommendations and building working relationships with the PSC and its allies. This month, Labor-Religion Coalition organized more than 130 faith and religious leaders to support CUNY and SUNY by signing a letter calling for significantly increased funding for both systems. The letter was sent to Governor Hochul, Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Heastie.

## A PROMISING YEAR

A year has gone by since CRA introduced the ND4C legislation, and the PSC launched its strategic budget and legislative campaign. Many PSC members have been motivated and activated during what has also been a year of leadership transition at the PSC. *Clarion* does not know, as of publication, the outcome of this year's state budget. The CUNY Board of Trustees approved a state budget request that, for the first time in over a decade, was one that began to match the massive needs of the university. That request resembled the New Deal for CUNY.

In January, Governor Hochul announced in her proposed budget that she would make major investments in higher education and add \$1.2 billion into the CUNY budget over the next five years. Building off what the governor proposed and what the leaders in both chambers of the state legislature put in their one-house budgets, the PSC has secured approximately \$500 million for CUNY. It cannot be overstated how significant this is.

For two decades, under ever-worsening financial and political times, the PSC did not retreat. No matter the reception in Albany the union continued to lobby and build relationships, and in turn, power with other organizations and legislators, many of whom we helped elect. When threatened with dire cuts under previous administrations, the union fought not to break even, but to make gains.

The PSC has been prepared for this moment of opportunity. PSC members and coalition partners in CUNY Rising Alliance have confronted each challenge and opportunity, mustering up creative initiatives while still sustaining the day-to-day work of their organizations.



Cory Provost, the interim chairperson of the CUNY University Student Senate, spoke at a recent PSC event.





## 15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

### Awards for CLTs

Each year the Unsung Heroes Awards Program recognizes College Laboratory Technicians who have positively influenced a department, program, college or organization from behind the scenes with a positive attitude, willingness to help in whatever capacity necessary and a commitment to excellence. The award is given to a person who, through their hard work and selflessness, goes above and beyond what is asked of them. The unsung hero is the person who does the thankless jobs in order to ensure that students and coworkers receive the service and support they deserve.

Nominate yourself or a colleague by the May 1 deadline. The form is available at [tinyurl.com/unsunghero2022](https://tinyurl.com/unsunghero2022).

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### ACADEMIC FREEDOM

# CUNY modalities threaten faculty freedom

By PHILIP PECORINO

There is an old adage that says crisis produces both danger and opportunity. As can sometimes be the case, opportunities include an increase in power for those who want to marshal more extensive power. At CUNY during the COVID pandemic crisis, the power of the chancellor's office may be advancing at the expense of faculty's academic freedom and their robust role in shared governance.

CUNY's decision, as communicated by CUNY Interim Provost Daniel Lemons, for a 70/30 split for Spring 2022 course offerings, divided between classes taught in-person versus those taught in modalities wholly or partly online, is a strong case of diminished faculty autonomy. Such teaching decisions are traditionally the purview of the faculty member in consultation with their department chair. However, during the pandemic, such faculty decisions have been abrogated to those in administrative roles. CUNY administration's overreach in regards to teaching modality decisions raise the specter of what other faculty decisions may be abrogated in a moment of crisis.

#### ACADEMIC JUDGMENTS

Academic freedom, as exercised by teaching faculty, has been recognized by the courts as including faculty's right to make their best academic judgments in regards to who teaches, what is taught and *how it is to be taught*. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities clearly states: "The faculty has primary responsibility for such fundamental areas as curriculum, subject matter and methods of instruction." The chancellor's office at CUNY is unilaterally deciding how classes are to be taught, or in other words, unilaterally deciding the "methods of instruction." This move threatens to violate one of the main pillars of academic freedom: a faculty member's right to make those modality decisions based on their pedagogical knowledge and experience with achieving the expected learning outcomes. In violation of this principle, administrators are now ordering modalities based on other considerations.

One of the more involved modalities, currently termed "HyFlex," is a costly one in terms of IT infrastructure, equipment, support staff and the work needed from faculty.

At Queensborough Community College, for example, department chairs were given a goal of a 70/30 split between classes offered in-person and classes that are either entirely online or involve some online components. In far too many other cases, faculty are not involved in the decisions on setting these goals or quotas concerning how classes are to be taught. Thus, the academic freedom of faculty is being ignored, suppressed or violated outright.

#### ROLE OF DEPARTMENT

The problem extends from the faculty teaching the courses to the role of the academic chair. It is the job of academic department chairs to assign classes to faculty by using their best judgments. The exercise of a chairs' best academic judgments is now being countered by administrators, not just in terms of the number of classes to be offered, but also by determining the modalities of instruction. In the wake of the COVID crisis, administrators far from their campuses and without knowledge of the students to be served by their specific programs and colleges, are establishing arbitrary measurements for such modalities. This meant, for example, that curricula designed and effectively taught as "hybrid" had to be partially refashioned as "in-person," in order for departments to achieve the arbitrary ratio.

Through 2020 and 2021, directives from the CUNY Office of the Chancellor were imposed on department chairs, forcing faculty repeatedly to adjust their teaching modalities and styles, sometimes in the middle of the semester. This additional work induces stress and frustration. It also infringes on academic freedom and ignores the faculty role in governance. This marks the first time in CUNY history, or perhaps in all of higher education for that matter, that when faculty are assigned their teaching schedules there are designations as to the modalities of instruction to be used. For example, face-to-face, hybrid, partially online, fully online or HyFlex. Department chairs use their best academic judgments in assigning classes to instructors based on their expertise and their ability to achieve the learning outcomes for a class. Now chairs are being forced to make judgments that include a consideration of how well a faculty member



Dave Sanders

Philip Pecorino, professor of philosophy at Queensborough Community College, says academic freedom is at risk with teaching modality decisions.

is suited or qualified to be assigned specific modalities, sometimes at the expense of the academic considerations that have traditionally been at the center of such decisions.

What is to be done? What can be done?

Insisting upon a small measure of respect from administrators to faculty making academic judgments based on academic criteria would be a good start. Academic department chairs could make it known to administrators who are imposing modality measurements upon them that they cannot meet those measurements and ensure effective instruction while also suggesting alternative distributions of modalities better suited for their current faculty and their expertise, competencies and experience. This intervention would be an exercise of department chairs' academic freedom and in keeping with their professional responsibilities as public educators.

Further, the PSC, as the AAUP chapter representing CUNY faculty, must support

its members in ensuring that faculty not be evaluated and found in any manner to be unsatisfactory in their teaching observations if faculty have made it known that they had reservations about being assigned a modality for instruction, especially if it is a modality with which their chairs do not have evidence of their satisfactory performance. The AAUP has clearly stated in a FAQ on pandemic resources on AAUP principles and standards that "principles of academic governance dictate that assessment of faculty teaching performance is the primary responsibility of the faculty, not the administration," noting that under the "extraordinary circumstances" of the pandemic, during which faculty have been forced to teach in modalities for which they are not sufficiently trained, "the faculty may wish to consider whether temporary adjustments in faculty evaluation, including suspending the administration of student evaluations, may be appropriate." Such decisions must be in the hands of faculty and department chairs alone.

#### UNION RESPONSE

Further, as is already occurring, the PSC needs to make known its objections to the imposition of modality measurements, which challenge the exercise of academic freedom at CUNY. Beyond this, all faculty, including department chairs and PSC members, need to work to preserve academic freedom so as to maintain the effectiveness of instruction for the students who we all serve. Decisions as to how faculty teach are best left to faculty and not administrators, who after all are focused on a variety of quantitative measures which they place above teaching excellence and the learning necessary for our students. As the AAUP notes in its FAQ on the pandemic: "The COVID-19 pandemic should not become the occasion for administrations to circumvent widely accepted principles of academic governance." Indeed, the AAUP continues, this is even more true during times of crisis such as ours: "However cumbersome faculty consultation may at times be, the importance and value of such participation become even greater in exigent than in more tranquil times."

*Philip Pecorino is a member of the CUNY University Faculty Senate's Academic Freedom Committee and a professor of philosophy at Queensborough Community College.*

## A CUNY teaching issue arises