

Clarion

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



JANUARY 2015



HIGHER ED Obama's new plan

Tuition-free
community
college for
millions.

PAGE 11



Photos by Gary Schoichet & PSC staff

A NEW UNION CONTRACT WHY WE NEED IT NOW

Above, PSC members speaking out for a new union contract at the annual budget hearing of the CUNY Board of Trustees. Chancellor Milliken and the trustees heard from 30 PSC members and officers; excerpts appear inside.

Union activists made the case for increased salaries at every level and offered unforgettable descriptions of the damage that unjust working conditions can inflict on CUNY students, faculty and staff.

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TECHNOLOGY

CUNYfirst: one more time

An upgrade to the computer system, billed as part of the solution to last Fall's severe problems, is delayed. But CUNY hopes to avoid a repeat performance. **PAGE 5**

ON CAMPUS

Racism, policing and teaching

The deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown raise issues that affect CUNY students every day. A look at how faculty have responded in their teaching. **PAGE 4**

RIGHTS & BENEFITS

Claim your Medicare refund

CUNY retirees with health insurance coverage from the City of New York can get reimbursed for Medicare Part B premiums. **PAGE 9**



ALBANY

Pressure from the grassroots

This year's State budget may affect funding for future contractual increases. Find out how you can help win this important fight. **PAGE 2**



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Clarion, breakfast of champions

● The December issue of *Clarion* was so interesting that at the breakfast table I interrupted my wife's reading at least three times in order to read to her passages from various articles. I especially enjoyed the articles that link our issues to broader political and economic concerns.

For example, "Always 'On Call' in Retail" describes the difficulties our students face when working part-time jobs with variable hours, making it impossible for them to attend classes predictably; the piece is also an informative description of an economy that ignores the needs of millions, who require regularity in their work lives.

"Where Our Money Goes" demonstrates to a readership in need of a new contract how the increased affordability of many consumer goods doesn't do the majority of wage-earners much good when wages are declining and vital necessities such as health care, housing and education grow increasingly difficult to afford. And "Defend the Safety Net" explains how politicians' "defense" of Social Security is often an attempt to weaken or privatize this most vital program.

It was also quite useful to learn that Benno Schmidt, chair of CUNY's Board of Trustees, has argued in favor of weakening the rights of faculty, in his endorsement

of a report by a conservative group founded by Lynne Cheney.

My wife hopes your future issues will be less compelling so she can read her novel in peace while enjoying her breakfast.

Elliot Podwill
BMCC (retired)

Coming together for equality

● September's massive climate march and the wave of protests against police killings of unarmed African American males represent the national marriage of the Occupy Wall Street movement with African American and Latino youth, a potent social synthesis directed against state terrorism and ecoterrorism. On December 4, they came together demanding justice for Eric Garner.

As I stood atop the steps of the infamous Tweed Courthouse on Chambers Street, now the headquarters of the New York City Board of Education, and watched the thousands of protesters stream by, I marveled at the ethnic and gender diversity of the marchers, so young and fierce, determined not to let slip by the chance to finally halt the long and sordid legacy of killings that have sullied the character of American society and made it a poor example to morally tout before the rest of the world.

"Black lives matter," "No justice, no peace, no racist police," and "Shut the system down" were the battle cries. This time the demands took on new meaning as "business as usual" was temporarily forced to a halt on bridges, highways and public squares. That it is a move-

ment that is national in scope, and one that witnessed large international echoes on the streets of London and elsewhere, are most hopeful signs that fundamental change can happen if "we the people" remain united in our cause to achieve genuine economic, social and environmental equality.

Anthony Gronowicz
BMCC

NAACP deserves our support

● In recent weeks, the legal murder of Michael Brown and so many other African American young men by police officers has given rise to national outrage. This upsurge of deeply felt emotions brought countless thousands into the streets to protest what, to many, is a contemporary manifestation of that purportedly extinct scourge, lynching. What can we do the day after we march, to have lasting impact? There are many answers. Here, I want to propose that you join the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, an action I have taken after letting my membership lapse some 50 years ago.

The NAACP is a truly national organization whose half-million members are organized into 2,200 chapters in 49 states and the District of Columbia. One of its central concerns has been the demand for equal treatment of black people by the criminal-justice system. In our courts, legislative bodies and the arenas that mold public opinion, the NAACP is there. Not just in the nation's media centers but in the Deep South and small towns and

cities across the US. In Ferguson, Staten Island, and Cleveland, sites of three of the most hideous recent murders, the NAACP has played an important role.

The NAACP's program parallels that of the American labor movement, and it supports a range of progressive goals – for example, upholding the equal rights of gays and lesbians to marry. It works to broaden the voting rolls and has fought against efforts to suppress voting by minorities, young people and the poor.

For all these many reasons, I urge you to become a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Gerald Meyer
Hostos Community College (emeritus)

A life is saved

● In this bleak season, I would like to salute two NYPD officers from the 108th Precinct in Queens, Officers William Caldarera and Corey Sarro, who, on December 16, saved the life of my longtime friend and colleague, LaGuardia Community College art professor Bruce Brooks.

On his very last day of a 40-year career, Bruce was heading to the C-Building in Long Island City, laden with gifts for people in his department, to turn in his final grades, when he collapsed on the sidewalk. Driving by, the officers spotted the crowd gathered around him and rushed over.

Officer Caldarera determined there was no heartbeat and that Bruce was not breathing. Officer Sarro began chest compressions

and LaGuardia Public Safety staff alertly brought out a defibrillator from the building. After two jolts of electricity, Bruce's pulse came back, and he began breathing. EMS personnel transported him to Elmhurst General. Later he was transferred to Cornell Medical for a triple bypass. He is now home and recovering.

James Grantham, LaGuardia's Director of Public Safety, informed me that the LaGuardia officers who assisted are CSA (Campus Security Assistant) Mohammed Kumal, Sgt. Richard Larreategui, Public Safety Officer George Rodriguez, CSA Devon Tomlin, CSA Frank Antwi and CSA Elijah Evelyn. They were in the process of bringing out the AED (automated external defibrillators) when they saw the NYPD officers had arrived and had started CPR. The AEDs are in all campus buildings and the Public Safety staff are all trained in their use.

Well done, Officers Caldarera and Sarro, and LaGuardia Public Safety. And thank you.

Danny Lynch
LaGuardia Community College

Work & study

● Much thanks for Shomial Ahmad's article (*Clarion*, December) about the retail industry's "shift toward on-call scheduling, where workers may only find out a couple of hours before their potential shift whether or not they're going to work." (And thanks to Stephanie Luce of the Murphy Center for the research that Ahmad reported on.)

One unit of my course on the Economics of Labor (at John Jay College) focuses on the current rapid increase in "contingent" employment. This article makes a great connection between that broader issue and students' real-life dilemma of balancing work and school; I plan to use it in that upcoming class.

Brent Kramer
John Jay College

A caring community

● I encourage and urge all of us at CUNY to work with our student governing boards and partner with local animal shelters, rescue groups, the ASPCA, the Humane Society, "pet therapy" volunteers and the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals in bringing homeless and adoptable puppies and dogs to our campuses. We shall be doing a mitzvah (a good deed in Hebrew) by possibly becoming an ally in facilitating an adoption and thereby providing a home to one of these "children of a lesser god."

On the legislative front, bills now before the New York City Council, NYC Intros 55-A, 136-A and 146-A, would restrict "puppy mills" and more closely regulate pet stores to ensure more humane conditions and reduce pet homelessness. Furthermore, New York City is on the cusp of becoming a "no-kill" city by 2015.

It behooves us to be a caring community, choosing to do business with our nonprofits over those who profit from the wholesale breeding, suffering and exploitation of these rightless puppies and dogs.

Lisa Flanzraich
Queens College

LOBBY DAYS

CUNY faculty and staff have even more than usual at stake in the union's legislative campaign this year because funding for future contractual increases may be affected by our fight. PSC plans an intense, all-out effort to gain new "maintenance-of-effort" legislation: a law that guarantees that inflationary costs, such as collective bargaining increases, are included in State funding for the public universities year to year. The PSC, NYSUT and UUP, our counterpart union at SUNY, are working put an end to the annual cycle of real-dollar budget cuts that weaken public higher education in New York State. To join our Albany efforts contact Amanda Magalhaes at amagalhaes@psccmail.org or 212-354-1252.

NYSUT Higher Education Lobby Day:
Wed. Feb. 25 (evening) - Thurs. Feb. 26

Student-Faculty Higher Education Lobby Day: Thurs. Feb. 26

NYSUT Committee of 100:
Mon. Mar. 2 (evening) - Tues. Mar. 3

Queens College HEOs and CLTs discuss issues



Queens College's new president, Félix Matos, met with members of the PSC's HEO and CLT chapters working at QC on November 17 for an open discussion on staff issues, including increased workload, health and safety, workplace bullying and inclusion of HEOs and CLTs in the college's Academic Senate.

Dave Sanders

Union demands progress on contract economics

By PETER HOGNESS

More than 9,000 CUNY faculty and staff have signed a PSC petition calling for action on a new contract settlement – and the number continues to grow. The statement urges Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio “to take immediate action to enable a fair settlement of the labor contract” at CUNY.

“We work at CUNY because we believe in what CUNY stands for, but we are not prepared to tolerate conditions that undermine our own lives and the life-chances of our students,” the petition says. “Our work is critical to New York’s future: we need a contract that lets us do our best,” a union statement said. (For information on how to sign the petition, see sidebar below.)

PUSH FOR OFFER

The union leadership and bargaining committee have focused on pushing CUNY to produce an economic offer. PSC President Barbara

Thousands sign PSC petition

Bowen called on the CUNY Board of Trustees to make an offer by the end of the Fall semester, but CUNY management failed to produce one.

“The union is prepared to escalate our campaign if that’s what it will take to get an offer on the table,” said Bowen in January. “Thousands of members have signed the petition demanding a good contract, and we are ready to make that demand public and uncomfortable for those in power. It is an outrage that CUNY management has not produced an economic offer after six months of bargaining and five years without a contractual raise. CUNY faculty and staff are not willing to wait much longer.”

Despite the University’s failure to move on economics, PSC negotiators say they continue to hold useful bargaining sessions with CUNY management, discussing in detail the specifics of the union’s agenda

as well as management’s demands. “Our strategy is to have as much preliminary discussion as possible so we can conclude a settlement quickly once there is movement on economics,” a union bargaining team member told *Clarion*.

In addition to signing the union’s contract petition by the thousands, PSC members also spoke out for a new contract in person, carrying their message to CUNY’s Board of Trustees at a November 24 public hearing. (See pages 6-7.)

CUNY salaries have fallen further and further behind the cost of living in NYC, Joyce Solomon Moorman, associate professor of music at BMCC, told the hearing. As a result, she said, faculty and staff are forced to live farther and farther away in order to find housing they can afford. “How does their long commute affect their teaching, time available for college service and meeting with students, and time for research?” Moorman asked.

Union members spoke in support of other priority contract demands, including a reduced teaching load to allow more time for scholarship and assisting individual students; basic job security for adjunct faculty; and a system of professional advancement for Higher Education Officer-series employees.

With no economic offer on the table, the December 9 bargaining session focused on PSC proposals on the rights of members in the use of educational technology and distance learning.

ED TECH

Demands presented by PSC negotiators included updating contractual provisions on classroom teaching observations for online learning environments; professional rights of faculty in the use of educational technology; and support for professional development. In this fast-changing field, union bargainers said that it is critically important to establish an ongoing labor/management committee to address new issues in educational technology as they arise.

“Management seems willing to engage with the union’s proposals,” a PSC negotiator told *Clarion*. Subcommittee meetings will continue the discussion in more detail.

The bargaining session on December 12 focused on the union’s demand for a comprehensive reduction in teaching load. Scores of PSC members attended as observers. CUNY listened, asked questions, raised the issue of cost, and agreed

to consider the PSC proposals in more detail.

Bowen presented the PSC’s position that there is an urgent need to restructure the workload of the full-time faculty. Deploying faculty members’ time more effectively would allow them to serve students better and to be more productive

“Our work is critical to New York’s future.”

as researchers and scholars, the union says. “Few things would be more transformative for the success of our students,” Bowen told *Clarion*.

The PSC’s demand is for a three-credit reduction in teaching load for faculty in full-time teaching titles. “Something must and can be done to restructure teaching load,” Bowen commented. A 21-hour teaching load is far above the national average for a four-year college, and this makes CUNY uncompetitive. SUNY’s research colleges, she pointed out, have a 2-2 load.

UNTENABLE

The 27-hour teaching load at CUNY’s community colleges is untenable for many reasons, Bowen said. “CUNY’s community colleges are part of a university system that recruits faculty with an eye to fostering significant research careers as well as teaching,” she explained.

“Every initiative at the colleges, many of which we support, adds committee obligations,” Bowen emphasized. “Faculty are leaving CUNY, and workload is often the main reason. We need to change the mindset that nothing can be done about teaching load.”

Bowen cited CUNY’s well-regarded ASAP (Accelerated Study in Associate Programs) initiative as “a blueprint” for the benefits of faculty having more time to spend with students: graduation rates more than double. “With this contract we have an opportunity to do something for all CUNY students,” she concluded. “If faculty workload is made more reasonable, students will benefit.”

The union has sought additional sessions to move other issues forward, while continuing to press for a satisfactory economic offer. As of mid-January, CUNY had agreed to hold a session discussing the union’s demand for a system of humane, professional job security for long-serving adjuncts.

Despite the absence of an economic offer, the December 9 bargaining session still included discussion of salary increases. PSC representatives strongly emphasized the need for comprehensive salary increases – increases for everyone – rather than a focus on

NYC LABOR IN BRIEF

Car wash workers’ fight

Workers at a Park Slope car wash have been out on the picket line since Thanksgiving week.

“These are workers who are paid a sub-minimum wage, and even then their wages are stolen, their tips are taken away, and they receive no protective gear – not even a lousy pair of gloves to deal with hazardous chemicals,” said Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union President Stuart Appelbaum.

In October, eight workers at Vegas Auto Spa, on 19th St. and 7th Ave. in Brooklyn, filed suit against their boss, Marat “Matt” Leshehinsky for more than \$600,000 in wage violations, including paying less than the minimum wage and not paying overtime for 90-hour work weeks. As retaliation, the owner cut hours, locked out workers who were organizing and refused to recognize workers’ right to form a union.

“Our community values social justice, and we’ve been willing to stand up for workers across the country,” said NYC Councilmember Brad Lander, whose district includes Park Slope. “Now the fight has been brought to our own backyard, and these workers have turned to us in their time of need.”

(To find out about joining workers on the picket line, go to tinyurl.com/Car-Wash-Solidarity. To donate to the workers’ strike fund, see tinyurl.com/support-car-wash-workers.)

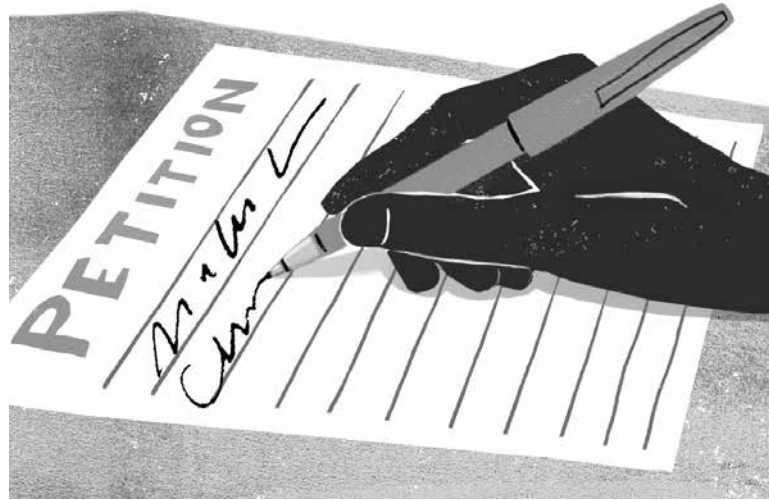
Zara workers’ victory

Zara, the clothing retailer, said it will increase the pay of its New York City employees to at least \$12 an hour after a petition drive, the Change Zara campaign, was organized by workers. The company had already announced it would end “on-call” shifts, another of the workers’ demands. This practice had required workers to be available, but with no confirmation they would actually work that shift and get paid until an hour or two before the shift began.

higher salaries for a few. The PSC team presented data on the decline in real-dollar value of CUNY salaries in past decades.

ACTION REQUIRED

As Fall semester wound down, Bowen spoke for many in expressing her frustration with the lack of an economic offer. “No one assumes that it is easy to address the political complexities of producing an economic offer for a university that receives funds from both City and State,” Bowen told CUNY trustees on November 24. “But a full summer and nearly a semester have passed since serious bargaining began and other municipal-worker contracts were first settled....The 27,000 faculty and staff I represent are demanding action.”



Time to sign is now

Have you signed the union’s contract petition? If the answer’s no, then now is the time to sign: you can go online right now at tinyurl.com/PSC-contract-petition. If the answer’s yes, that’s great! Now you can amplify your voice by calling or emailing a colleague and making sure they have signed as well.

So far more than 9,000 bargaining unit members have added their name to urge Governor Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio “to take immediate action to enable a fair settlement of the labor contract” at CUNY. The more that faculty and staff unite behind this statement, the more attention it will receive.

Petition urges governor, mayor, to act

Everyone represented by the PSC is eligible to join in: full-time and part-time, faculty, staff and retirees. If you’d like a paper copy of the petition to distribute on your campus, contact your chapter chair (see the list and contact information at tinyurl.com/chapter-chair-directory) or email Brian Graf in the PSC office at bgraf@psc-mail.com.

Four years without a contract and five years without a contractual raise is enough! Make sure you’ve signed the PSC’s contract petition, and ask your colleagues to do the same.

-PH

Teaching on racial injustice & policing

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

For many CUNY faculty, teaching about the deaths of Eric Garner and Michael Brown was unavoidable. Issues raised by these cases are not some distant concept that CUNY students learn about only in the classroom, faculty told *Clarion*: for many of their students, injustices like racial profiling are an everyday reality.

"This semester, one of my best students missed an individual conference with me, [because] he had been stopped and detained by the police on his way to the train to school," Tony Alessandrini, associate professor of English at Kingsborough Community College, told *Clarion*. "Ironically, we were supposed to meet to discuss a research paper he was writing on racial discrimination in detention and imprisonment." The student had done nothing wrong, Alessandrini said: "[This is a] representative experience for a lot of young, African American students...at KBCC."

RACIAL INJUSTICE

In Adrienne Urbanski's class at BMCC, a black student described being ordered out of his car at gunpoint. The reason? Police assumed he had stolen the car because it had a broken window, Urbanski said. Other students "shared their personal experiences of being stopped and frisked by the police when they were simply on their way home from work," she added.

"Our student body is Michael Brown," said Maureen Fadem, an assistant professor at Kingsborough. "We can't just teach our classes and go home. Our students need this [discussion]."

The CUNY student body and CUNY faculty also include working police officers. William Doherty, a police sergeant in Nassau County and an adjunct associate professor at Queensborough Community College, says that when there is a major news event that relates to his class on criminal law, he uses it as a reference point. "Typically, I'll ask if anyone read the newspaper and I'll have that person open up discussion. I'll figure out a way to tie it in," he told *Clarion*. Doherty says he focuses on "black-letter law," established legal rules that are rarely disputed, and combines that with his personal experience: "I explain it from the perspective of someone who puts handcuffs on people."

The deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner this past summer sparked a growing public debate on racism, policing and the US criminal justice system. And during Fall semester, faculty across CUNY tackled these subjects in the classroom. The deaths of NYPD Officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu came at the end of the semester, during final exams; faculty members said the impact of their deaths would become part of discussions in the Spring.

Discussion on recent cases



Barbara Winslow, professor of education at Brooklyn College, (R), teaches many working K-12 teachers. Winslow's student Yorel Greene (L) says it was important for her middle-school students to discuss and learn about the issues around the death of Mike Brown and Eric Garner.

Sara Simons, an adjunct assistant professor at City Tech, taught a course this past Fall that addressed the deaths of Garner and Brown and put them in a larger context. Reading for the 200-level English class, "Whose America?," included the country's founding documents, literary works, such as Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Anna Deavere Smith's play *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992* and articles about Ferguson, Detroit and Los Angeles.

MILITARIZED POLICE

"We compared photos of police in riot gear, tanks, et cetera, from these earlier episodes [in Detroit and Los Angeles] with eerily similar photos taken in Ferguson in August," Simons told *Clarion*.

Law students in professor Frank Deale's class on federal administrative regulation looked at the 1033 Program, a federal program that allows police forces to acquire "excess" military equipment. "Students wrote about ways that the notice-and-comment rulemaking process and public mobilization could be utilized to roll back the program," Deale told *Clarion*. Students in Deale's federal courts class wrote about potential legal strategies "to defeat burdensome permit requirements that have been used to provide police with foreknowledge of protest plans and routes, allowing them to re-

strain people's desire for direct action [and] civil disobedience," Deale said.

Avram Bornstein, an associate professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, has been teaching critical race theory to members of the NYPD for more than a decade. Readings in his class span historical instances of race and policing, from slave patrols and controlling race "riots," to looking at *Floyd v. City of New York*, the case in which a federal judge ruled that the NYPD's stop-and-frisk tactics were unconstitutional. Bornstein's class analyzes how institutional bias operates; he says he aims to move the discussion beyond "dichotomous arguments" in which either "all cops are racists" or "there's no race problem in the NYPD." Bornstein says that a key goal of his class is to get students talking to each other.

"It's pretty intense. It's very personal, because police officers are facing this in very complicated ways," said Bornstein. "There's a great deal of internal criticism" of NYPD policies, Bornstein added. "There's an incredible critique of the numbers game," the reliance on quotas.

Saul Roth is a retired Nassau County police lieutenant who worked for 10 years in New York City, in the NYC Transit Police, in Corrections and the NYPD. Today he teaches as an adjunct lecturer

at Queensborough Community College. "No minority person should be profiled, and neither should police officers," he told *Clarion*. It's important for the public to understand that institutional policies set the context for individual officers' actions, Roth says: "Police officers are not like professors who have academic freedom. They enforce the policies of those that supervise them."

DANGERS OF POLICE WORK

Roth says he wants students to understand the risks that cops face: he describes an incident during his years on the NYC Transit Police when a routine interaction over a minor violation suddenly turned violent. There was a struggle for Roth's nightstick, and Roth was thrown onto the tracks. "You don't know where an incident is going to go," Roth emphasized. "I know what force needs to be used to effect an arrest."

Dangers of police work were tragically highlighted by the December 20 shooting of Officers Ramos and Liu. Officer Liu (promoted, like Ramos, to detective after his death) had been a student at CUNY: a graduate of Kingsborough Community College, he also studied at College of Staten Island. When Liu and Ramos were killed just before the end of the semester, many CUNY faculty held a moment of silence, as faculty had done for Eric Garner earlier in the semester. Eric Garner's daughter, Emerald, is also a former CUNY student: she was previously enrolled at BMCC.

These intimate connections with CUNY show the role it plays in the lives of working-class New Yorkers, so it is no surprise that these topics often burst into CUNY classrooms. That happened in Barbara Winslow's course on Diversity in the Inclusive Classroom at the Brooklyn College School of Education, which focuses on institutional racism and the school-to-prison pipeline. The class includes many working teachers, and Winslow often begins by asking them what their own students are talking about: unsurprisingly, discussion about the Garner and Brown killings was high on the list.

STUDENT DISCUSSION

"We spent time discussing how their students reacted to the two non-indictments," Winslow said. "One teacher created her own lessons about Ferguson, Staten Island, racism and the schools."

That was Yorel Greene, who teaches at Collaborative Arts Middle School in Queens. "I saw urgency in teaching because my students fit into all these statistics, all of these molds," said Greene. All the students in her class are African American or Afro-Caribbean and many come from low-income families, she told *Clarion*. "I felt that it was important for them to

discuss what's going on in America and in their community."

In Greene's new lesson plans, news videos, articles and editorial cartoons served as launching points for class discussion on public and police reactions to the non-indictment in Ferguson, the effectiveness of protest and how the media portrays events. She plans to continue to address these issues in the rest of the school year and hopes that more of her colleagues do the same.

"Crisis-response teaching is sometimes inevitable" and can be important, says Naomi Braine, associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College. But the headlines reflect problems that are longstanding. "The structural processes of racial injustice are embedded in the day-to-day," Braine told *Clarion*. "Teaching about them should, ideally, be part of ongoing pedagogy."

For Spring semester, several CUNY colleges are planning large events around racial justice and the legal system. College of Staten Island's CORE Program, a freshman-level civics course, is planning a week's worth of mass lectures in mid-March. Donna Scimeca, CORE program coordinator, is helping plan the "moderated open forums," which around 2,000 students will attend.

"I don't think racism is going to go away anytime soon," Scimeca told *Clarion*. "Students really are concerned; it's an opportunity for the college to give [students] a chance to have that conversation."

At Kingsborough Community College, there will be a daylong symposium, "99 Voices Teach Ferguson." At the February 10 event, faculty, students and staff will reflect on the roots of injustice.

SYSTEMIC INJUSTICE

Hank Williams, who addressed the Garner and Brown cases in class this semester, will be a presenter at KBCC, discussing how the image of "the black criminal" is constructed, and how this connects to policy decisions and institutional structures. An adjunct lecturer in English and African American Studies who has taught at CUNY since 2002, Williams hopes the event will place particular instances of racial injustice in a larger context.

"We have to go beyond thinking of racism as just an individual thing, and deal with larger issues of structural and institutional racism," Williams told *Clarion*. "There's a moment, and there are protests and there's a movement. At some point you need to begin to think strategically. Hopefully, people will be able to look deeply at what's going on right now and see where it connects to systemic issues."

For a list of readings for teaching about racial injustice and police conduct, see psc-cuny.org/Jan15-Resources.

'Our student body is Michael Brown.'

Dave Sanders

A CUNYfirst upgrade is delayed

By PETER HOGNESS

After the CUNYfirst computer system crashed repeatedly at the beginning of Fall semester, CUNY officials identified three main steps for preventing such problems in the future. One of those steps, a software upgrade for one of CUNYfirst's main components, will not be in place by the start of Spring semester, *Clarion* has learned. But CUNY information technology (IT) staff say other measures have been taken to make CUNYfirst more stable, and they expect that Spring term will get off to a smoother start.

If the system does crash, users may have better options than they did when CUNYfirst was out of service last semester: a new system called MyInfo will be able to provide certain basic information even when CUNYfirst is down.

CUNYfirst controls everything from course registration to employee payroll – so when it failed at the start of the Fall 2014 semester, the outages caused a wave of problems. Students could not find out whether a course was still open for registration, or even where it was supposed to meet; faculty could not get access to class rosters; staff were unable to update student records (see *Clarion*, October 2014).

In a September email to senior CUNY administrators, Associate Vice Chancellor Brian Cohen promised action “to prevent such problems from recurring in the future.” Cohen, the University’s chief information officer, wrote that the Fall semester problems had been caused by “Oracle’s Identity Management System (IMS), which provides user access to CUNYfirst” – that is, it controls user log-ins. He identified an upgrade of the IMS to the latest version, 11g, as one of three key tasks for ensuring that such crashes did not recur.

BEHIND SCHEDULE

Version 11g will “be ready for launch later this year, prior to the next peak volume in January 2015,” Cohen wrote – but *Clarion* has learned that this target will not be met. Instead, CUNYfirst will start the Spring semester with the old version of the IMS, version 10g.

Other measures have been taken to make the system more stable, however, and CUNY IT staff are cautiously optimistic about how Spring semester will begin. “From what I’ve seen of the testing, there should not be the problems we saw in the Fall,” said one CUNY IT staffer (who, like others interviewed for this article, asked to remain anonymous).

“CUNY decided to postpone the upgrade of the IMS system to version 11g,” said a January 6 statement from CUNY’s Office of Media Relations, in response to questions from *Clarion*. “Development and configuration delays would have meant that the 11g system would be deployed just prior to the start of the Spring academic semester.

But other changes completed

CUNYfirst
Fully Integrated Resources & Services Tool

The CUNYfirst System is currently unavailable to all users.



Actual CUNYfirst users were not this happy when the system was repeatedly out of service last Fall. Users are hoping Spring semester will be different.

Since CUNY wanted to conduct more testing on 11g prior to deployment, CUNY decided that IMS 10g – after fine-tuning and testing – was a better option....CUNY believes, based on the test results, that the system can meet the demands of the Spring 2015 semester.”

While the administration and CUNY information technology staff both say that Spring semester should start more smoothly, CUNY has also been working to be more prepared than it was last Fall if CUNYfirst does crash. When CUNYfirst was out of service last Fall, most colleges had no way to look up information as basic as the location of a given class. At one senior college, staff helped students locate their classes using “paper copies of the class schedule that one of our managers was farsighted enough to download during one of the few times CUNYfirst was working,” a PSC member told *Clarion*. “Can you imagine a business as large as CUNY not having a back-up system?” another asked.

ALTERNATIVE SYSTEM

Taking such comments to heart, CIS (CUNY Information Services) has been developing a limited alternative to CUNYfirst, a separate system that would continue to operate even if CUNYfirst is down. Originally dubbed “CUNYfirst Lite,” this new system has been renamed “MyInfo,” CUNY IT staffers told *Clarion*; it will provide students and employees with access to a limited set of basic information on a “read-only” basis.

MyInfo will use data from the previous day, which CUNYfirst uploads each night to a separate CUNY data warehouse. It should allow students to see things like a list of the classes they are signed up for, and where those classes are supposed to meet.

Faculty could see their class rosters. But because MyInfo will be based on yesterday’s data, it will not indicate whether a course is full or still open for additional registration – an important limitation at the start of the semester. Since MyInfo will make information available on a “read-only” basis – that is, it will not provide a way to update CUNYfirst data – it will be less useful for CUNY professional staff who are normally entering changes in CUNYfirst throughout the day.

“It won’t be perfect,” said one IT staffer, “but it’s definitely better than nothing.” Ironically, another employee told *Clarion*, MyInfo “is a ‘shadow system’ – one of the things that CUNYfirst was supposed to get rid of.”

MyInfo’s response time could be significantly better than the normal operation of the problem-plagued CUNYfirst system, IT staff told *Clarion*. “MyInfo will use what’s called ‘materialized views’ – basically it’s a pre-processing of the data, generated each night for every user, that lists a lot of basic information in one place,” a CUNY IT specialist explained. “That means you won’t need to wait for a lot of separate queries to look up each piece of information – it’s already there, in one place. So instead of a student waiting, say, 15 or 30 seconds, they’ll just wait for one second.”

POOR PERFORMANCE

That difference highlights the poor performance of CUNYfirst even when the system is operating normally and is not out of service. Users often complain about screens taking a long time long to load, or a given process requiring many more screens than before – with the re-

sult that it takes much longer to do many of the same tasks.

Besides upgrading the Identity Management System to version 11g, a move that is now postponed, Cohen’s September email identified two other key tasks for avoiding system crashes in the future: doing improved load testing before the start of Spring semester and “tuning” the system – adjusting various parameters to achieve more stable performance.

FALLING SHORT

Oracle had said that CUNYfirst passed its “stress tests” prior to Fall 2014, and that the system was robust enough to handle as many as 10,000 concurrent users. But in fact CUNYfirst failed last Fall well before that level was reached: in an October 8 report obtained by *Clarion*, Cohen told CUNY’s Council of Presidents that the system had failed “when load reached 8,500 to 9,000 users.”

(These are figures that the CUNY administration had refused to disclose. As *Clarion* reported in October, “the administration declined to say how many simultaneous users the system had experienced this Fall.” At the time, CUNY would say only that the system had crashed “during peak loads created by an unprecedented number of concurrent user sessions.”)

Why was Oracle’s original load testing so wrong? Answering that question was the second of the three key measures identified in Cohen’s September email.

“What they need to do is test the mix of transactions that were being done when the system failed,” said an independent IT consultant with experience in academic systems integration. “What the system can handle depends on the types of transac-

tions,” the consultant told *Clarion*. “If it’s just a simple query, you might have 20,000 people do it at once and not have a problem. In Oracle’s earlier load testing, most likely someone assumed a certain group of transactions, but that didn’t match what actually happened.”

“Our examination of the load testing conducted by Oracle showed a number of factors that needed to be changed in the methodology,” CUNY’s Office of Media Relations told *Clarion* in January. “CIS [CUNY Information Services] has conducted additional load tests...based on load data from the Fall 2014 semester,” the administration said. As parameters were adjusted to reflect those specific conditions, CUNY said, “these tests have shown improved IMS performance.”

The university “has also hired an independent, third-party consulting company with expertise in Oracle IMS and higher education,” the statement added. “These consultants have been...working with CUNY to ensure performance testing is conducted appropriately.”

‘TUNING’ THE SYSTEM

The third key task named by Cohen was “tuning” the system – adjusting different parameters in the Identity Management System. “Oracle did put a lot of work into fixing some of the problems,” a CUNY IT staffer said, and CUNYfirst should now be more stable in the face of sudden increases in user demand.

The administration’s January statement said that CUNY has “made substantial effort” to “address the problems experienced at the start of the Fall 2014 semester, and prevent those problems from recurring at the start of the Spring 2015 semester.”

Hundreds of thousands of CUNYfirst users are hoping that will be enough.

Fast-food worker one-day strike



Members of Make the Road New York joined others in supporting fast-food workers’ fight for a \$15-an-hour minimum wage. On Dec. 4, workers in more than 150 cities took part in the day action and civil disobedience organized by Fast Food Forward.

FACULTY AND STAFF SPEAK OUT

A new contract: why we need

Chancellor Milliken and the CUNY Board of Trustees heard from 30 PSC members and officers at the Board's annual budget hearing on November 24. Union activists submitted testimony about the CUNY Budget Request for 2014-2015 and its connection to a fair PSC-CUNY contract. Together, they made the case for increased salaries at every level and offered unforgettable descriptions of the damage that unjust working conditions can inflict on CUNY students, faculty and staff. Here are excerpts adapted from that testimony; full text of all presentations is online at tinyurl.com/PSC-Contract-Speakout.

It's time for action: CUNY is in crisis

BARBARA BOWEN

PSC President
Associate Professor of English
Queens College & the Graduate Center

CUNY is in crisis. You may not feel the crisis yourselves, but listen to our voices today, and you may begin to understand the urgency felt by faculty, staff and students. You may think that CUNY is okay because we keep working even though we have gone five years without a contractual raise. I am here to tell you that CUNY is not okay.



The university is in crisis because the people who make it work are suffering, whatever their position. Research faculty have no time to do research, academic departments are losing faculty because of low salaries, instructors at every level cannot give students the attention they need, professional staff are struggling to live on salaries below the cost of living, remedial instructors teaching full time are being paid part-time wages and adjuncts working essentially full time at CUNY can end up on food stamps. If that's not a university in crisis, what is?

No one assumes that it is easy to address the political complexities of producing an economic offer for a university that receives funds from both City and State. And no one underestimates the cumulative effect of years of planned disinvestment in CUNY, leaving base budget problems to be addressed in the contract. But a full summer and nearly a semester have passed since serious bargaining began and other contracts were settled. While we appreciate that the chancellor has voiced his support for settling the contract, the 25,000 faculty and staff I represent are demanding action.

It is time for the trustees and the CUNY administration publicly to take on the austerity politics that leave the public sector, and especially public higher education, starved of funds while State surpluses regularly go to corporate tax breaks. There is a \$5.1 billion surplus in Albany right now; that money should be prioritized for reinvestment in public higher

education, which has taken a disproportionate share of statewide cuts. As the elected representative of CUNY's miraculous, diverse, idealistic, undervalued faculty and staff, I call on you to produce an economic offer before the end of the semester that will restore our salaries and begin to create working conditions that support us, rather than obstruct us, in doing the work we believe in.

Our salaries are not competitive

STEVE LONDON

PSC First Vice President
Associate Professor of Political Science
Brooklyn College

The decline in the value of instructional staff salaries is quite dramatic and leaves CUNY colleges non-competitive with comparable institutions in the area. Here are some examples of the decline expressed in terms of 2010 constant dollars, which corresponds with the end of the last contract.



If salaries had simply kept pace with inflation since 1971, then in 2010:

- The top step of the Professor/HEO salary schedule would have been \$172,000 rather than \$116,000;
- The median step of the Associate Professor/HEO Associate salary schedule would have been \$119,000 rather than \$74,000;
- The salary range for the Assistant Professor/HEO Assistant salary schedule would have gone from \$81,000 to \$114,000 instead of \$43,000 to \$82,000;
- The top step of the Lecturer salary schedule would have been \$94,000 rather than \$75,000;
- The top step of the CLT salary schedule would have been \$70,000 rather than \$59,000;
- Finally, the Adjunct Lecturer bottom step, where most adjuncts are hired, would have been \$4,700 for a three-credit course instead of \$2,900.

The decline in our salary structure has real consequences for our members' ability to teach, to do research and manage life in New York City and the metropolitan area. The cost of housing in New York City and transportation alone makes it difficult for many instructional staff

to live near the college where they work. These costs and others make it hard to recruit and retain faculty. Even though the applicant pool in response to many job announcements is rich, the low salaries and high teaching load make recruiting and retaining top choices problematic. Churning of new hires and recruiting a diverse faculty are becoming increasingly difficult problems to solve without the resources necessary to increase salaries.

If CUNY had kept pace with inflation over the last 40 years, we would indeed be competitive today. But the sad truth is that CUNY's defunding and poor contract settlements over the years have led to CUNY's current non-competitive status. If CUNY wishes to recruit a diverse, high-quality instructional staff in the years to come, then substantial salary increases need to be negotiated.

Contingent faculty deserve job security

MIKE FABRICANT

PSC Treasurer
Professor of Social Welfare
Hunter School of Social Work

There is an urgent need for job security among part-time faculty barely cobbling together a subsistence living working at CUNY. In the recent past, CUNY management and the PSC worked closely to assure stable health insurance for eligible part-time faculty. Together, we were able to make this issue a priority and solve it primarily because we saw the instability of health insurance as profoundly inhumane and a visible festering wound that ran right across the University. With the same political will, we can also solve the contingent faculty job security crisis.



Present estimates indicate that between 60%-70% of post-secondary classes nationally are being taught by part-time faculty. A part of this labor force is assembling its entire livelihood within the academy stitching together four or five courses a term. At CUNY, 13,000 instructors are part-time as contrasted to a count of about 7,500 full-time faculty. CUNY has failed to acknowledge until very recently the need for basic worker rights for



At the CUNY Board of Trustees annual budget hearing, PSC activists spoke out for union

this work force. Yet the working conditions of part-time instructors demean not only part-time faculty but also those of us working alongside colleagues who can be fired or terminated at will by the employer. The learning conditions of students being instructed by part-time faculty are affected when their teachers are not assured job security. How can a faculty member properly prepare a class when she doesn't know until a week before the beginning of the term that she will be hired?

When universities increasingly hire part-time faculty who are insecure, it makes it much easier for the employer to impose the same conditions on full-time faculty and the rest of the academy's labor force. And so, as a full-time faculty member, I will fight for job security with full- and part-time colleagues because we understand that our fates are bundled together. Offering workers full-time jobs piecemeal or one course at a time and without job security or a living wage is simply inhumane, a toxin that poisons the university. The consequence of a lack of job security is concrete and rapid – loss of employment, loss of capacity to pay rent, the disintegration of a health-care lifeline and over time a downward spiral for colleagues unable to rapidly reassemble their work lives. Some of our colleagues go hungry, are evicted and descend into illness because of a lack of job security.

The PSC has a proposal for part-time faculty job security. It is reasonable, just and long overdue. As a university, we can take the important step of assuring the most vulnerable faculty a modicum of what many of us at CUNY take for granted – basic job security. The

absence of such security for part-time faculty who have labored for years at CUNY and teach multiple courses each term is a practice that disfigures the university and those of us who fail to change it. Full-time faculty, part-time faculty and staff are coming together to say we have had enough of a system that renders our colleagues little more than disposable cogs in a higher-education machine. CUNY can do better, CUNY must do better.

HEOs need a system for professional advancement

ARTHURINE DESOLA

PSC Secretary
Higher Education Assistant
Queensborough Community College

I am speaking in support of providing a collectively bargained system of professional advancement for Higher Education Officer-series employees.

CUNY's HEOs are the 4,000 women and men – predominantly women and men of color – who provide vital student services and the administrative expertise that supports countless CUNY programs. There would be no ASAP, CUNY's widely praised Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, without HEOs. There would be no financial-aid counseling without HEOs, there would be no American Social History Project or continuing education courses and professional programs without the work that HEOs do.



d it now



contract demands.

Yet HEOs are profoundly demoralized and alienated. In the last few years we have seen a hasty and ill-considered effort to change our time-and-leave reporting as well as the disastrous introduction of CUNYfirst. But the overriding reasons for HEOs' low morale across the University are twofold, both related to the contract: the urgent need for a raise and the equally urgent need for a system of professional advancement.

Consider one HEO-series employee I know who runs the day-to-day operations of an enormously successful – and profitable – master's program. She is an Assistant to HEO, the lowest-paid HEO title, and she has been at the top step of that title for seven years. No raise, no step increase, nowhere to go. Yet in the past eight years, the number of students in her program has increased threefold, to over 300. She shoulders this increased responsibility, because she is the heart of that program. As the professors in charge change over time, she makes the program work.

But because CUNY relies on a rigid classification system, this Assistant to HEO cannot be promoted. She continues to work with integrity in her job because she loves CUNY. But CUNY is in danger of losing people like her if the University continues to fail to recognize the need for an additional system of HEO advancement.

I call on you today to address the urgent cry from HEOs across the University for the professionalism and respect we deserve. CUNY relies on us to do professional work; CUNY should treat us as professionals. That means adding a system that recognizes

and rewards us when our work expands significantly and our job performance redefines our jobs.

Students are hurt by heavy teaching load

CRAIG BERNARDINI
Associate Professor and Chair,
Department of English
Hostos Community College

Trying to pursue a research agenda at a college with a 27-hour teaching load, class sizes well above what our professional organizations recommend, and very high service expectations is incredibly daunting. We are forced to do our research in dribs and drabs, sneaking a few hours to research on weekend mornings, hoping to be able to bank enough hours in a semester to really dig in our heels. It's impossible to find any continuity for longer, more ambitious projects under such conditions, except during annual leave.

Simply put, it is not possible to fulfill an ambitious research agenda working in the conditions that we do. We end up cutting corners with our students to find adequate time to meet a deadline for a presentation or article. We drop off a committee, and risk raised eyebrows at P&B. Or, we abandon our research agenda to make time for the mountains of papers we have to grade. However we do it, we end up neglecting one thing to make time for another. There is simply not enough time. And so



we fight to make it, sometimes at the expense of our students, sometimes our college...and sometimes, perhaps most sadly, at the expense of our own health.

Last semester we at Hostos began having group mentoring meetings for junior faculty in departments around the college. Our next meeting is on the topic of managing workload. And what am I, the senior faculty member with ten years' experience, the department leader, supposed to tell them? About how I passed out at the dinner table in front of guests because I was so sleep-deprived from trying to keep up with the work? It's a funny story, but it hardly amounts to mentoring. I have few strategies to offer, more consolation and commiseration.

We need to give people time to balance their careers between research and teaching. The most important thing a new contract could do would be to reduce the teaching load by three hours across the University.

We need more time for tomorrow's artists

GEORGE EMILIO SANCHEZ
Professor and Chair,
Performing & Creative Arts Department
College of Staten Island

One of the hidden factors of our current workload is how much time we need to mentor and give guidance to our students. There is an unacknowledged world of mentoring that we are constantly engaged in. We need a new contract that will respectfully honor the time and labor that goes into fully mentoring our up-and-coming artists and professionals.



College Lab Techs need respect & a raise

DEBORAH HERTZBERG
Senior College Laboratory Technician
Brooklyn College

Our Department of Theater produces four productions each semester. During a regular work week I typically work 40 hours, instead of the contractual 35 hours. During a week when we are mounting a show, I often work around 50 hours. In all my 12 years, I have never been compensated in pay for hours worked in excess of 35 hours. CUNY's new time sheets [should] be implemented in a manner that does not degrade our professionalism and facilitates payment for overtime hours worked. The contract must include wage increases for CLTs, who are among the lowest-earning instructional staff members.



Equity in annual leave for library faculty

JILL CIRASELLA
Associate Professor of Library Science
Graduate Center

Librarians in CUNY are faculty. However, faculty in library departments work 35-hour weeks all year round, whereas other faculty work the academic calendar and also have winter and spring breaks. We receive far less leave time than other faculty members in the University. And the leave time we do get is not enough to fully develop, pursue and expand our research agendas. I have a backlog of at least three articles that I haven't been able to write because of lack of leave time. I turned down a book offer from a well-known library-science publisher because I did not have enough leave time to give it the attention it deserved.



Teaching economics for cut-rate pay

ARLENE GEIGER
Adjunct Lecturer in Economics
John Jay College of Criminal Justice

I teach three courses each semester and one in the summer, a total of seven courses per year. After over 20 years teaching as an adjunct at CUNY, my annual gross pay is \$27,841. For many years this has been my sole or primary source of income. This is half of the median salary in New York City. Do you believe this is fair compensation for the work adjunct faculty do?



Full-time work with a part-time label

LESLIE DEGIERE
Continuing Education Teacher
Bronx Community College

Even with 25 contact hours a week and extensive preparation beyond that, CLIP and CUNY Start teachers are only considered part-time employees. This leads to a variety of unacceptable problems. In CLIP, if we don't teach in the summer session, we lose our health insurance. We even lose our health insurance if we teach within the same program but at a different campus. Enrollment goes down in the summer so there isn't enough work for those of us who can't afford to lose our insurance. CLIP and CUNY Start instructors need full-time status, to recognize the full-time work that we're already doing.



Maintain parity in salary & benefits

FRANK MUÑOZ
Assistant to HEO
Bronx Educational Opportunity Center

The Educational Opportunity Centers are the front-line education and service providers to many "almost forgotten" NYC residents who have dreams and aspirations to improve their lives. On many occasions, our staff and faculty have to take on responsibilities beyond their duties, simply because of the lack of funding for much-needed services and programs. EOCs want to maintain parity in salary and benefits with CUNY employees in equivalent titles.



Adjuncts are struggling to make ends meet

MARCIA NEWFIELD
Adjunct Lecturer
BMCC

I have been working as an adjunct at CUNY for 26 years. I hear so many stories of people, adjuncts, struggling to make ends meet. Even when we teach a full load of 15 contact hours per semester, which most of us don't, we earn less than \$30,000 a year. Our classes may be cancelled at any time. There is no job security, no payment for cancellation of classes.



The founders of this university, took the risk in 1847 to imagine that the children of workers could benefit from a chance at higher education. Can't you imagine a way to pay college teachers a living wage, give them working conditions that enhance their mission, and give them opportunity to develop their potential? I think you can if you want to.

A new contract, and a good contract, now

FELIPE PIMENTEL
Assistant Professor
Hostos Community College

We are losing faculty every year because of our non-competitive salaries and heavy workload. We cannot afford to live in NYC with non-competitive salaries. We cannot accept an economic offer that would not even keep up with inflation – especially in a city where inflation is higher than in most cities in the US. We need real gains in our economic compensation. We need a new contract, and a good contract, now.



Arnold Cantor is remembered

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Arnold Cantor, the first executive director of the Professional Staff Congress, passed away on December 22. Cantor, who served as executive director from the union's founding until 1995, was a major force in the life of the PSC. "The PSC officers and staff mourn the passing of Dr. Arnold Cantor and offer our condolences to his friends and family," said Steve London, PSC first vice president.

"He shaped the union," said Irwin Yellowitz, a labor historian and professor emeritus of history at City College. Yellowitz worked closely with Cantor for 22 years, during Yellowitz's terms as PSC treasurer and vice president for senior colleges. Cantor

First PSC executive director

"was the chief negotiator for contract bargaining sessions," Yellowitz recalled. "He was really involved in negotiating every line in the contract."

Cantor was instrumental in union gains such as securing across-the-board raises for faculty and staff after the 1970s fiscal crisis, and obtaining the job security protections for Higher Education Officers spelled out in article 13.3b of the PSC/CUNY contract. Under Cantor, the union established staff positions for in-house legal counsel, a full-time editor of *Clarion* and a pensions advisor.

'He was a man with a mission.'

"Dr. Cantor made a major contribution to academic trade unionism in the 25 years we served together," past PSC president Irwin Polishook wrote in an online memorial (see tinyurl.com/arnold-cantor). "There are many individuals who will remember how he helped them in their professional lives."

Clarissa Gilbert Weiss, who served as the PSC's director for pensions and welfare benefits during Cantor's tenure, remembers him as a "ferocious" advocate for PSC faculty, a leader who recognized the

professionalism of CUNY's HEOs and CLTs and a believer in promoting women within the PSC staff.

Both Cantor and his wife Meriam were avid musicians. She was a violist for the Rochester Philharmonic; before coming to the PSC, Arnold was a secondary-school music teacher who played the clarinet. He performed at union events, such as a benefit concert for the Belle Zeller Scholarship Trust Fund, and played with an AAUP chamber music group.

LATER LIFE

After retiring as executive director, Cantor worked as an adjunct assistant professor at Baruch and earned his doctorate from CUNY. His dissertation, "The Academic

Union as an Evolutionary Product of the Traditional Trade Union," was a historical and sociological look at the Professional Staff Congress.

"He was a man with a mission, and you knew that once you sat with him," recalled Paul Montagna, a professor emeritus of sociology at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, who was one of Cantor's dissertation readers. "But he was able to look at the history of the union objectively and critically."

Cantor and his wife Meriam later moved to Ohio, where they lived their final years.

She died there in 2009. They are survived by their five children, Nadine, Duane, Paul, Glenn and Erica. Contributions in Arnold Cantor's memory may be made to the Dr. Arnold Cantor Memorial Fund, c/o The Cleveland Music School Settlement, 11125 Magnolia Drive, Cleveland, OH 44106.

Students organize around changes to discipline policy

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

At its December meeting, the CUNY Board of Trustees unanimously approved a new policy on sexual misconduct in the wake of increased national attention on the problem of sexual assault on campus. A CUNY working group took months to draft the new policy, which was welcomed by student leaders.

But in the process of updating the sexual misconduct policy and CUNY policy on student discipline, a board of trustees committee voted to eliminate a long-standing student right – the right to remain

Administration changes course

silent without the assumption of guilt – during all campus disciplinary hearings. Students spoke out against the change and ultimately prevailed.

STUDENT VICTORY

"Usually when things get approved by a committee, they get rubber-stamped by the Board of Trustees," City Tech senior Lucas Almonte told *Clarion*. "It's a huge win for students and student governments." Almonte, the Uni-

versity Student Senate (USS) representative to the Board of Trustees Committee on Student Affairs and Special Programs, was part of the resistance to this part of CUNY's disciplinary policy change.

The reversal came after an organized and vocal student effort. College-level student governments passed resolutions, student-authored op-eds circulated through student papers at many colleges and about 20 City Council members signed a letter in support of the student activists' stance.

DUE PROCESS

At a November 24 Board of Trustees hearing, more than a dozen students spoke out to urge that the right to remain silent be continued unchanged. Cecilia Salvi of the Doctoral Students' Council told the Board that "safeguarding" the right is "in the best interest of students as well as the reputation of CUNY as a place of public higher education." Seung Hyun Brian Jeon, a student representative on Baruch College's disciplinary committee, said that he had not been notified about these "critical changes" to the discipline policy until the University Student Senate brought it to his attention.

Councilwoman Inez Barron, chair of the City Council's higher education committee, also spoke at the hearing, testifying in support of the students' position.

Many of the students who spoke at the hearing prefaced their remarks by saying that they supported the University's efforts to update its sexual assault policy in compliance with Title IX, the landmark federal law that prohibits gender discrimination at academic institutions. The Obama administration has recently been more active in using Title IX to press for clearer policy and better practice in relation to sexual violence cases.

Hunter College is one of 85 institutions currently under federal investigation, in relation to a complaint filed in February 2013. College officials say the complaint was withdrawn six months later and that the investigation is now "a general review of how Hunter handles complaints related to alleged sexual misconduct." No public comment has been made by the student who originally filed that complaint.

The Trustees' resolution cited "guidance from the Office of Civil Rights of the US Department of Education" and "recommendations of the White House Task Force to Protect Students from Sexual Assault" as having spurred CUNY's policy review. The new policy establishes a standard of "affirmative consent" to sexual activity: "Consent can be given by words or actions, as long as those words or actions create clear permission regarding willingness to engage in the sexual activity. Silence or failure to resist does not, in and of itself, demonstrate consent," the policy states.

CUNY student activists, who supported this change, pointed out that eliminating the right to remain silent in discipline hearings was in no way required by anti-discrimination laws or regulations, a point that university officials acknowledged.

COMMITTEE APPROVAL

In the November 3 Student Affairs and Special Programs Committee meeting that initially approved this controversial change, CUNY Trustees Chair Benno Schmidt and Senior Vice Chancellor for Legal Affairs Frederick Schaffer both advocated changing CUNY bylaws to remove students' right to remain silent without the assumption of guilt. That right was added to the University's bylaws in November 1970, during a time of widespread student protest at CUNY. The proposal backed by

Schaffer and Schmidt would have ended this right in all student discipline hearings, not just those on sexual assault.

In the committee's discussion, Schaffer cited the tragic death of a Baruch College student during an off-campus hazing incident. During subsequent disciplinary hearings, some students did come forward to testify – but Schaffer said that if they had not done so, no disciplinary action could have been taken "despite the very, very serious nature of the offense."

Manfred Philipp, PSC Chapter Chair at Lehman College and former chair of the University Faculty Senate, spoke out at that committee meeting against this change. Philipp noted that students' testimony during a disciplinary hearing could later be used against them in a criminal trial, where the right to remain silent without the assumption of guilt is a constitutional right.

REVERSAL

Schmidt concurred with Schaffer in the committee discussion, saying he wanted to give investigators "widest latitude" to determine what happened. But at the December 1 Board of Trustees meeting, it was Schmidt who delivered the news that Chancellor James Milliken had "recommended that our current policy regarding the right of silence remain unchanged," citing "compelling [student] testimony" and similar policies at other universities as reasons for the reversal; Schmidt added that he concurred with this decision.

Lucas Almonte, the student member of the Board committee that had initially approved this change, said that he was surprised by the administration's change in course.

"We knew we had to overcome a lot," Almonte told *Clarion*. "We showed our potential, and that'll help build momentum for future campaigns."

Disappeared college students



Members of the PSC's International Committee were among those who marched in a November 21 protest at the Mexican consulate over the abduction and disappearance of more than three dozen education students in the Mexican town of Ayotzinapa. The United Federation of Teachers and the PSC delegate assemblies both passed resolutions condemning the abductions and the Mexican government's complicity.

Dave Sanders

Your Medicare Part B premium refund

By CLARION STAFF

If you retired from a full-time position at CUNY and have retiree health insurance coverage from the City of New York, you may be eligible to receive reimbursement for the monthly premium you pay for Medicare Part B. It could save you more than \$1,200 a year – or twice that amount if your spouse or domestic partner meets eligibility requirements.

Medicare Part B is the part of Medicare that covers doctors' visits, outpatient care and other services not covered by Medicare Part A, which covers hospitalization. In most cases, the Medicare B premium is deducted from your Social Security check.

In 2015, most retirees on Medicare will pay a monthly Part B premium of \$104.90 per person. If your modified adjusted gross income, as reported on your IRS tax return for 2013, is above a certain amount, you will have to pay more. The threshold is \$85,000 if filing an individual tax return, or \$170,000 on a joint return.

Medicare beneficiaries with incomes above these thresholds must pay progressively higher Part B premiums above the standard monthly amount. This additional premium, above the standard monthly rate, is known as the Income Related Monthly Adjustment Amount (IRMAA). If you must make these IRMAA payments, the amount can change each year depending on your income.

GETTING SIGNED UP

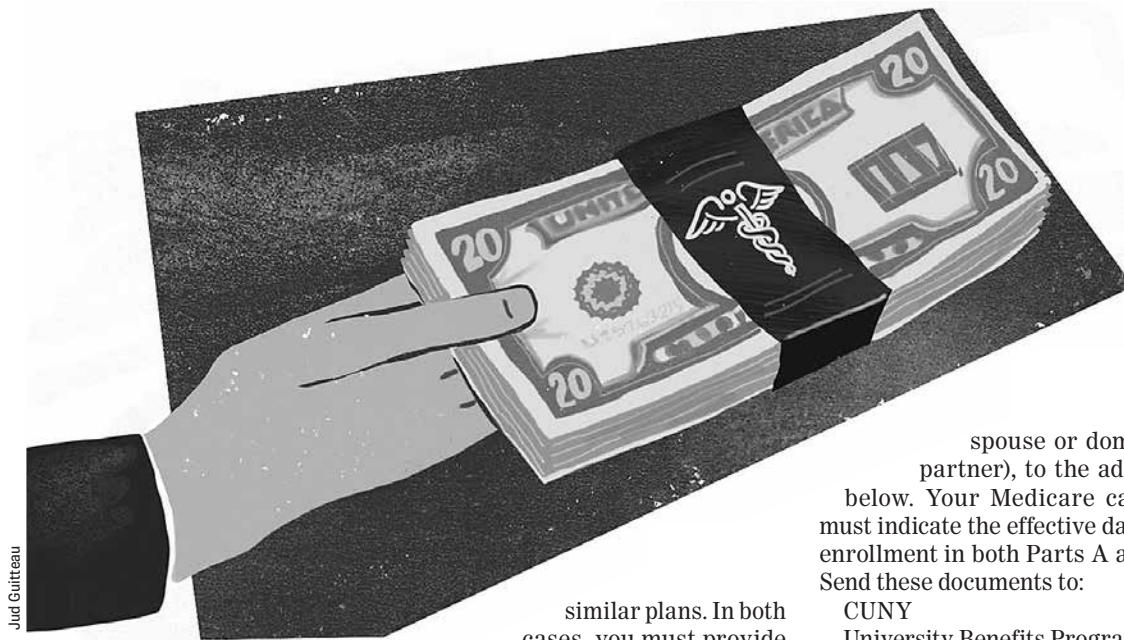
Reimbursement of your Part B premium is processed by the New York City Health Benefits Program, and you won't receive reimbursement unless you have submitted notice of your eligibility. You do not need to submit an annual request to receive reimbursement for the standard monthly premium; once you are signed up you will continue to receive this basic reimbursement each year. Retirees in the Teachers' Retirement System (TRS) with City health coverage must write to the NYC Office of Labor Relations (see below), while retirees in TIAA-CREF or other retirement vehicles in CUNY's Optional Retirement Program (ORP) must send a form to CUNY (see below).

If you pay more than the standard monthly premium, because of IRMAA, you can also be reimbursed for the additional amount. However, you must apply annually for the IRMAA reimbursement, by completing a separate application and submitting it to the NYC Office of Labor Relations (again, see below for details).

UNION ACTION

Reimbursement of your Medicare Part B premiums is a benefit that was won through union action. Municipal unions first won reimbursement at the bargaining table in 1966, but a succession of mayors pled poverty and paid only a portion of the premium. In 2001,

A union-won benefit



Jud Guiteau

the City paid just 70%, which was then \$384. The return to 100% reimbursement was won through "old-fashioned politicking" by the New York City labor movement, says Irwin Yellowitz, a labor historian and former chair of the PSC Retirees Chapter.

By 2000, "it had been an issue that was out there for a very long time," Yellowitz said. The reimbursement meant more and more to people, especially lower-paid City workers, as the premium was going up steadily. "The argument that the City couldn't afford it didn't wash anymore," he said.

New York City unions, including the PSC, the UFT and AFSCME District Council 37, helped mobilize retirees and other members to send postcards, meet with City Council members and testify before the Council on the issue. In 2001 the City Council passed a measure reinstating the full reimbursement and overrode Mayor Rudy Giuliani's veto of the bill. But Giuliani sued to block implementation, and the measure remained tied up in court. In 2002, union efforts finally bore fruit: with Giuliani out of office, the City agreed to drop its suit.

CLAIM YOUR REIMBURSEMENT

The process for requesting reimbursement of the monthly standard premium for Medicare Part B is different for members of the NYC Teachers' Retirement System and for members of TIAA-CREF or

similar plans. In both cases, you must provide a copy of your and/or your eligible dependents Medicare card(s), which must indicate the effective dates of your enrollment in both Parts A and B. (Be sure to send a copy, not the original.)

If you are receiving your pension check from TRS you must contact the NYC Health Benefits

Program. Your letter must include copies of the Medicare cards and birth dates for yourself and spouse or domestic partner; your retirement date, pension number and pension system; the name of your health plan; and the name of your union welfare fund (the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund). You must send your letter to:

NYC Office of Labor Relations
Health Benefits Program
40 Rector Street, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10006
Attn: Medicare Unit
Participants in NYCERS (the NYC Employees' Retirement System) or BERS (Board of Education Retirement System) should also send their letters and copies of Medicare cards to this address.

If you are receiving your pension check from TIAA-CREF, you must complete an application that is available on the CUNY website and submit it to CUNY's University Benefits Office. The application is online at tinyurl.com/CUNY-TIAA-Part-B. Send the completed form, plus copies of your retiree health insurance card and your Medicare card (and Medicare card of your

spouse or domestic partner), to the address below. Your Medicare card(s) must indicate the effective dates of enrollment in both Parts A and B. Send these documents to:

CUNY
University Benefits Program
555 W 57th Street, 11th floor
New York, NY 10019

TIAA-CREF members should make sure to follow this procedure: it is the only way to ensure that you will receive your Part B reimbursement.

DON'T DELAY

You should sign up for reimbursement immediately upon receipt of your or your dependent's Medicare card (which must indicate enrollment in Part B). For reimbursement of this monthly standard premium you will only need to sign up once. But be sure to notify the agency to which you originally applied (either the NYC Office of Labor Relations or CUNY University Benefits Office) of any address or status changes to

avoid delays in receiving your reimbursement check. (See sidebar also.)

Please note that if you will receive City health coverage in retirement, you may apply to receive reimbursement for Medicare Part B payments for your spouse or domestic partner even if you yourself are not yet Medicare Part B eligible.

REIMBURSEMENT FOR IRMAA

Reimbursement for the standard premium payments is generally sent out in August of the year after those Part B payments were made. Reimbursements for IRMAA payments are processed later, usually the following March. For example, reimbursement for standard Part B premium payments made in 2014 would be sent out in August 2015, while IRMAA reimbursements for that year would be sent out in March 2016.

The form to apply for reimbursement of IRMAA payments made in 2013 is available at tinyurl.com/NYC-HBP-forms. The reimbursement form for 2014 payments should be available there by August 2015. Remember that to receive reimbursement for IRMAA payments, you must apply annually.

Retirees who have a major life-changing event and whose income has decreased can request a reduction in their IRMAA payments by completing a Medicare IRMAA Life-Changing Event form or scheduling an interview with their local Social Security office. (People who are newly retired are often overcharged for these premiums, when Social Security looks back at the prior years' income.)

For further information, contact the NYC Health Benefits Program (212-513-0470) or the University Benefits Office (646-664-3350).

Check not in the mail?

According to information provided by the City of New York to the Municipal Labor Committee, approximately 17,000 retired municipal employees did not receive their Medicare Part B premium reimbursement checks owing to a problem with forwarding addresses.

Retirees who have not yet received an expected reimbursement check should write to: NYC Health Benefits Program, 40 Rector Street, Attn: Medicare Unit, New York, NY 10006. Your letter should include Social Security number, current address, telephone num-

ber, and a copy of the Medicare card for yourself and any affected dependents. The City's investigation process takes approximately six to eight weeks from receipt of the information.

Alternatively, retirees who have not received an expected reimbursement check may email information about the problem to the PSC/CUNY Welfare Fund at communications@pscunyw.org. Be sure to include all the information listed in the paragraph above; the Fund will forward this information to the NYC Health Benefits Program.

Clarion JANUARY 2015

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VIEWPOINTS

Racial justice & policing

For this Clarion op-ed roundtable on racial justice and policing, we received many more contributions than we have room to print. On this page we're publishing edited versions of three; see our online edition for the full text of each and for five additional viewpoints (psc-cuny.org/RJP-roundtable). These PSC members approach the issues from different disciplines and from different sets of experience; we welcome letters to the editor in response.

"The failure to issue indictments in Ferguson and Staten Island – the decision not even to take the cases to trial – suggests that black and brown lives in the United States continue to be devalued," PSC President Barbara Bowen wrote in December. "The PSC has a strong tradition of opposing institutional racism and calling for an end to the overuse of police force." From a moment of silence to public protests, she said, members were seeking ways "to share our sorrow and anger over another needless death."

Later the same month, Bowen and the PSC spoke out against another loss of life. "The PSC condemns the murder of Detectives Wenjian Liu and Rafael Ramos," Bowen said. "Though many classes are not in session," she noted, "PSC colleagues have held moments of silence in their memory at several colleges," as CUNY faculty and staff had done for Eric Garner two weeks before. "The PSC will continue to work peacefully for a justice system that is fair to all and for a world no longer deformed by racism," she concluded. "Those are goals that can unite us all."

THE CURRENT CRISIS

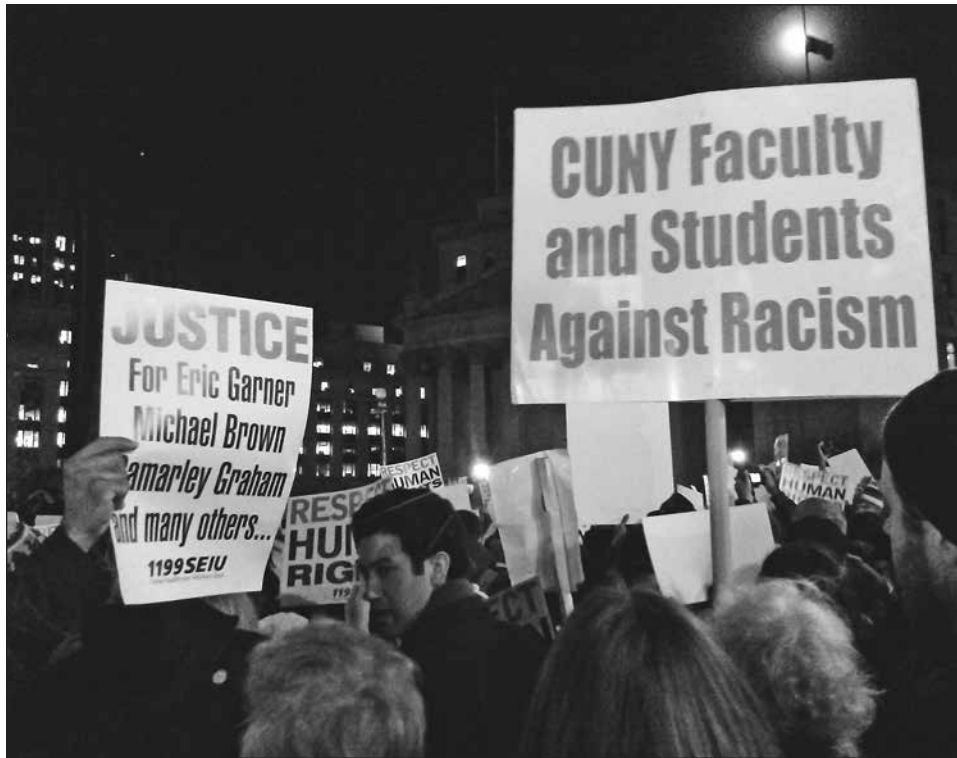
By **WAYNE MORELAND**
Queens College

When I was a child, going to public schools in New York City, we were encouraged to believe that "prejudice" was the fault of bad people, that an improved sense of brotherhood was what was needed to bring this state of prejudice to its deserved end. We were taught that racism, bigotry and their adjuncts were moral failures that could be cured by more understanding, more exposure to "different" groups, by, in a word, empathy, an empathy that would heal the damaged heart.

However, as we became more conscious of the world around us, as we grew up, we understood that world very differently. We came to know that throughout the African and African American presence in America – since there has been an "America" – an anti-black bias has been built into the American system, bias meant to injure, defame, enslave, restrict, defeat, belittle black people, and that this structure was not the consequence of misunderstanding or of the influence of "bad" people but instead is at the heart of the American project.

STRUCTURAL RACISM

The familiar term "institutional racism" is not nearly comprehensive enough to register the scope of this structure, pervasive as it is in the nation's customs, language and laws. Outside of the years 1863-1870 and 1963-1973, practically every law, edict, statute, ruling and regulation passed and invoked at every level of American government – local, state, federal – has been designed to injure black people. We can see



Above, union members taking part in a December 4 protest in Foley Square over the killing of Eric Garner.

that the response of white America to the presence of black people in its midst goes far beyond the ideology of the "injured heart." And the role of the police as the front line of this order, as the armed force that enforces this social order, is nowhere more evident than in the recent events stirring the nation.

Seen in this context, the unjustified deaths of Mike Brown, Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Tamir Rice, Dontre Hamilton, Trayvon Martin et al, and the subsequent inability of the state to hold anyone responsible for these deaths, are not aberrant. That these deaths have spurred outrage, demonstrations, anger and, most of all, a critical rethinking of the role of race in American life after a long quiet period should be seen as an opportunity to finally address this central contradiction in our national life. This current crisis, and it is a crisis, can be seen either as an instrument for addressing the failings of the nation or as a mechanism to reinforce the status quo. But that status quo is unenforceable now. Because, in the words of a graduate of another New York City public school, James Baldwin of DeWitt Clinton High School, "To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time."

See psc-cuny.org/Moreland for full text online.

WHAT NOW?

By **STEVEN ZEIDMAN**
CUNY School of Law

When one examines policing in New York City to determine how we got to this place of anger and distrust, one criminal-justice culprit is the police commissioner's signature tactic – "broken windows" policing, an approach derived from a magazine article published in 1982.

As conceived over 30 years ago, the broken windows theory did not call for massive numbers of arrests for minor behavior. That variation on the broken windows theme, known nowadays as "zero tolerance," is an

NYPD creation. Police officers working in communities of color were encouraged to maintain order by making lots of arrests and came to understand that they would be evaluated accordingly. As a result, throngs of African Americans and Latinos are arrested for things like taking up two seats on the subway, riding a bike on the sidewalk or talking with friends on a street corner.

While zero tolerance policy did not directly cause Eric Garner's death, it certainly set the stage. Dispatching 34,000 police officers with the daily mandate to "maintain order" increases dramatically the number of police-citizen interactions. That, in turn, increases dramatically the likelihood that something will go horribly, tragically, wrong.

Mayor de Blasio was elected on an avowed progressive agenda. He has promoted reforms in education, housing and immigration. In each case, the mayor looked forward to new ideas and approaches. And yet on criminal justice, he is tethered to the commissioner and wedded to the past.

CHANGING STRATEGY

Now the mayor and commissioner promise change. The entire police force will receive retraining and a number of police officers will use body-worn cameras. However, these initiatives will be of little practical value if the officers are still expected to make countless arrests and issue infinite summonses in black and Latino communities for minor crimes, offenses and completely innocuous behavior. It is not simply a matter of training or filming – it is the overarching policing strategy that must change.

New York City is a different place from when broken windows was adopted as the primary law enforcement strategy in 1994. Can it really be the case that it remains the best way to police? Eric Garner's death, and the public outcry that has followed, certainly suggests otherwise.

So, what now? Hopefully, a 21st century approach to policing.

See psc-cuny.org/Zeidman for full text online.

DON'T DELAY REFORM

By **NIVEDITA MAJUMDAR & JOHN PITTMAN**
John Jay College

The non-indictment of the police officers involved in the deaths of both Michael Brown in Ferguson and of Eric Garner in Staten Island brought to a rolling boil the long-simmering outrage at police misconduct and resentment at policing practices nationwide, bringing into relief the simple but urgently felt truth that "Black lives matter." And so tens of thousands of people took to the streets – and stayed there week after week – voicing their indignation and demanding structural transformation of a criminal justice system with its systemic pattern of racialized law enforcement. The PSC participated in these protests, and was right to do so: most of our students are working-class, young people of color – potential targets of unjust police practices.

And then a young black man killed two NYPD officers, Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu, in Brooklyn, after shooting his ex-girlfriend in Maryland and shortly before taking his own life on a subway station platform. Such an act deserves our unequivocal condemnation, and protesters advocating for police reforms have done exactly that. The tragic loss of Officers Ramos and Liu was the result of a desperate and murderous act by a deeply disturbed man. It is yet another consequence of the dismal failure to institute adequate gun control legislation.

POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Not surprisingly, the tragic event has become the pretext for an ideological counter-offensive by defenders of the criminal justice status quo. The mainstream commercial media has often played along, airing false claims that the protesters had incited violence. More notably, the president of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association claimed that the police deaths were the fallout from Mayor de Blasio's positions, and this was followed by police protests against the mayor. All of this demonstrates an arrogant rejection of the demand for transformation in policing practices as well as a disregard of civilian authority. But a brutal crime cannot be allowed to drown out the cries of tens of thousands against abuses of police power.

Police reform must not be delayed. Mechanisms to ensure police accountability to the communities they patrol, greater community control over police matters, enhanced police training and a step back from "broken windows" are all imperatives that cannot wait. As protest leaders have often pointed out, this is not about the competence of the broad body of NYPD officers as individuals, but about the structural conditions for ensuring "courtesy, professionalism, respect," and fighting to keep racial profiling out of police work.

Let us also note that criminal justice practices and miscarriages, problematic as they are in themselves, are also signs of deeper ongoing catastrophes. The cop on the beat is not the problem, and not the solution. We're a nation that has more jails than schools, that abides consistent double-digit unemployment rates in communities of color while municipalities and local governments count on policing practices as revenue streams; a nation in which bankers can bring economic devastation down on society while racial disparities and wealth inequalities swell without limit. These are structural and interweaving issues that we must engage, and criminal justice reform would be a step forward.

See psc-cuny.org/Maj-Pitt for full text online.

'Police reform must not be delayed.'

Race & policing

In addition to full text of the viewpoints on page 10, the online edition of Clarion's op-ed roundtable on racial justice and policing includes these articles (see psc-cuny.org/RJP-Viewpoints for full set):

From Clifford Glover to Eric Garner

By Paul Washington

"Today we have a movement that has gone beyond being a 'moment' but has grown from being cries for justice into this multiethnic, multiracial coalition of people who have protested, demonstrated, stopped traffic and led 'die-ins' across America. These actions have placed racial profiling, police killings and the criminal justice system on notice." (See psc-cuny.org/Washington for more.)

Paul Washington is director of outreach at the Medgar Evers College Black Male Initiative; he has been involved in organizing against police violence for more than 30 years.

Listen to Community Voices

By Delores Jones-Brown

"The deaths of Eric Garner, Akai Gurley and Ramarley Graham, among others, all point to the fact that policing in New York City has gone terribly awry. Unarmed residents are dying repeatedly at the hands of the police....Rather than sticking doggedly to a policing approach based on a favored theory, the police department needs to listen to the voices of all New Yorkers." (See psc-cuny.org/Jones-Brown for more.)

Delores Jones-Brown is a professor of law and police science at John Jay College. A former assistant prosecutor, she is the founding director of John Jay's Center on Race, Crime and Justice. She is author of *Policing and Minority Communities: Bridging the Gap*.

The Scope of the Problems

By Avram Bornstein

"We should not reduce these problems to assumptions of individual prejudice.... Police should not be a scapegoat for the pervasive institutional racism in America; neither should they be immune from processes of anti-racist reflection and reform." (See psc-cuny.org/Bornstein for more.)

Avram Bornstein is associate professor of anthropology at John Jay College. He is director of its Master of Arts in Criminal Justice Program and co-director of the college's NYPD Leadership Program.

The Functioning of the System

By Ben Lerner

"When a police officer murders a person of color with impunity, the system isn't broken. That's the system functioning all too smoothly...." (See psc-cuny.org/Lerner for more.)

Ben Lerner is a professor of English at Brooklyn College. He is author of the novel *10:04*.

Changing the Role of Police

By Alex Vitale

"What is needed...is not to 'improve' the police through increased training and diversity in hopes of achieving a more community-friendly form of policing – a goal that is unlikely to be met given the basic structural function of police. Instead, what's needed is to develop less punitive and more empowering and restorative mechanisms for addressing crime and disorder problems that in the process seek to reduce inequalities." (See psc-cuny.org/Vitale for more.)

Alex Vitale is associate professor of sociology at Brooklyn College. He is author of *City of Disorder: How the Quality of Life Campaign Transformed New York Politics*.

Free community college

Millions could benefit each year

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

This January President Obama unveiled a plan to "bring down to zero" the tuition cost for community college students around the nation. "Two years of college students will become as free and universal as high school is today," Obama declared.

The White House estimates that around nine million students could benefit each year, at an estimated \$60 billion cost over the coming decade. Under the president's proposal, the federal government would fund three-quarters of the average cost of community college, while states that take part would pay for the rest. Students would be required to maintain at least a 2.5 GPA, be enrolled at least half-time and make steady progress toward their degree. Participating colleges would have to ensure that credits are transferable to four-year colleges or have effective job training programs.

"For CUNY community college students Obama's proposal indicates the will to make access to a quality and affordable higher education achievable," said Anne Friedman, PSC vice president for community colleges. "The fact that students wouldn't be forced to study full-time can alleviate pressure to work excessive hours. When students can focus more on their studies, we can do more to improve retention and graduation rates."

CUNY RECOGNIZED

Obama laid out his plan in a Jan. 9 visit to Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville. Last year Tennessee's state legislature approved legislation that established the "Tennessee Promise," making community college tuition-free for every high school graduate in the state, through state lottery money. Tennessee is the first state to pass such a plan; Oregon and Mississippi are looking at similar proposals.

The president's proposal, "America's College Promise," emphasizes improving student outcomes at community colleges, and a White House fact sheet detailing the plan singles out CUNY's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) as an effective way to improve student performance and boost rates of degree completion. The ASAP initiative waives tuition, helps pay for books and transit and increases resources for academic advising and other supportive services.

"We join with President Obama in offering ASAP as a national model to be expanded both here in New York and throughout the nation," stated CUNY Chancellor James Miliken. "In 2014, ASAP produced a three year graduation rate of 57%, over triple the rate of urban community colleges nationwide."

'FIRST DOLLARS'

Under the Obama administration's plan, the funds for eliminating students' tuition burden would be "first dollars," meaning that they could be used to cover tuition before other aid like Pell grants and federally-subsidized loans are tapped. This would facilitate using those other sources of aid to cover non-tuition expenses, like room and board or transportation. The proposal is not just limited to recent high school graduates.

Nowhere in the plan is there any discussion on adjuncts' working conditions.



US President Barack Obama speaks on his new proposals for tuition-free community college at Pellissippi State Community College in Knoxville, Tennessee, on January 9.

Maria Maisto, president of New Faculty Majority, told the *Chronicle of Higher Education* this is "a glaring omission," asking, "Is it going to be funded on the backs of adjuncts?" While a White House fact sheet gives a framework for the plan, many details are still unknown. Both fans and critics agree these will need close scrutiny.

Obama's dramatic proposal comes when lawmakers are preparing to renegotiate the federal Higher Education Act, which governs federal financing of college education. Progressive activists have come out strongly in support of the administration's plan and argue that tuition-free community college should be "just a start." Groups like Progressive Change Campaign Committee and Democracy for America "say the proposal should be just the first step toward cost-free four-year public colleges," reported the Congressional political newsletter *The Hill*.

Many higher education experts say the plan follows in the spirit of the original GI Bill, which sent nearly eight million World War II veterans to college. Sara Goldrick-Rab, a professor of educational policy studies and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison told the Madison *Capital Times* that the Obama plan is "both smart and bold."

Goldrick-Rab, a specialist on the financing of higher education, has been an advocate for free community college tuition. Last year she co-authored a report for the Lumina Foundation titled "Redefining College Affordability: Securing America's Future with a Free Two-Year College Option." The report recommended a reallocation of federal funds to make public colleges free while making a mix of stipends and work-study jobs available to cover living expenses.

In a recent article in the *Guardian*, Goldrick-Rab says that today the odds of getting a college degree are "more tightly linked to family income than ever before." People from low-income families often pay nearly 40% of their income to attend community

college, she notes, and middle-class families commonly spend a quarter of their income to enable a family member to attend a public university.

RIISING STUDENT DEBT

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten also backed President Obama's proposal. "With decades of stagnant wages and rising student debt, young people and returning adult students alike are either deterred from going to college or, when they do choose to attend, are buried under debt," Weingarten said. "Students deserve a high-quality, affordable and accessible higher education," she emphasized. "And our 21st-century economy needs an educated workforce prepared to compete."

POLITICAL BATTLE

More details on the proposal are expected during the president's State of the Union address on January 20. Many political observers say that the plan faces an uphill battle in the Republican-controlled Congress – but precursors to the Obama plan have won broad support, sometimes crossing party lines. Tennessee Promise, which was advanced by Republican governor Bill Haslam, has seen more than 90% of the state's high school graduates sign up, more than double initial expectations. Local plans for free community college tuition have been adopted in cities as diverse as Tulsa and Chicago.

The initial response from voters to Obama's plan appears positive: a recent Rasmussen poll found that 47% of those surveyed supported it, while 39% are opposed.

"The most powerful and enduring American social policies - Social Security, infrastructure investments like the highway system and indeed public education itself - have always benefitted everyone," wrote Sara Goldrick-Rab in a piece for the *Guardian*. "Congress should, if anything, seek to outdo Obama with an even more ambitious proposal, rather than negotiate to reduce his package."



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

Know a new retiree?

Tell a colleague – a retiree or one who is going to retire – to sign up for a reimbursement for Medicare Part B. It could save them more than \$1,200 a year for themselves and twice that amount if their spouse or domestic partner meets eligibility requirements.

The process of claiming the reimbursement depends

on an individual's retirement plan, and full details on how to claim the benefit are outlined in an article in this issue on page 9. This reimbursement is a benefit won by municipal unions in 1966, and after some clawbacks in ensuing years the reimbursement is back to 100%. Tell your colleagues to be sure to sign up without delay.

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NEWS

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ARTS & CULTURE

Student contest honors work

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

For many working students at CUNY, the labor they do outside of college seems separate and apart from their academic studies. Labor Arts, an online cultural project about creative expression by unions and working people, aims to bridge that separation through its annual contest for CUNY undergraduates, "Making Work Visible." The contest – which this year has a March 2 deadline – awards cash prizes of up to \$1,000 in four categories: essays, poetry, narrative and visual arts.

To have a labor arts contest at CUNY, where so many students work while attending college, seems like a "natural" fit to Evelyn Jones Rich, a founder of Labor Arts (laborarts.org) and an activist in the PSC Retirees Chapter. "We want students to have an understanding of the unique contributions that working people have given to this country," Rich told *Clarion*. "I'm talking about the eight-hour day, the 40-hour week." Those gains were won, Labor Arts emphasizes, by workers who insisted that the value of their jobs and their lives be recognized.

WRITING ABOUT WORK

For years, City Tech English professor Jane Mushabac has asked her students to write about the work that they do – and since the Labor Arts contest began five years ago, she's been encouraging them to enter.

"It's a rich source of detail, emotion and meaning," Mushabac told *Clarion*. "It's always an exciting essay to assign and then to read."

Mushabac tells students that she doesn't want a piece about "my first job," but something that details the work they do – whether it's taking care of a diabetic uncle or working in a high-energy

children's gym. Focusing on "the where" and "the how," she guides her students in writing their first essay of the semester.

Mushabac gives students a worksheet to brainstorm details before composing their essay, and she shares other writing about work, including a former student's essay about working at a Mexican deli and grocery in the Bronx. The little details, like tape peeling from the store's sign that's colored like a Mexican flag, and busy Sundays when customers are waiting outside before the store opens, give students inspiration for their own essays.

A VISUAL ARCHIVE

The Labor Arts website is an online archive that's primarily visual, and its CUNY student contest links visual and written expression. "Students submitting written work must include an image that is related to the themes in their writing," the contest rules explain, while those submitting visual artwork must also submit a paragraph discussing their work.

Rachel Bernstein, a founder of Labor Arts who works on public history projects with the Wagner Labor Archives at NYU, says the contest helps promote "visual literacy" and reflection on "how images convey meaning." For an image to accompany written entries, students can search through the photos, posters, paintings, illustrations and cartoons in the Labor Arts digital archive, or they can submit an image of their own.

Recent winning entries include a student's poem about a worker who arrives before everyone else, "even before the sun," paired with a painting of a tired waitress in a harshly lit, empty café. Another, a student's painting of a coffee-shop waiter with slouched shoulders and many hands, hemmed in by large, menacing animals, is accompanied by his thoughts



Queens College student Jonathan Batista holds his winning painting.

on growing up in the projects and being assumed by others to be uneducated or a thief. A short story about a bagel cart worker contrasts the regular customers who share confidences about their families with the anonymous crowd at the morning rush: "I cannot tell most of them apart.... They are always hurrying and gazing into their phones or their watches as if they were looking at their future in magic crystal balls."

Associate English professor Carole Harris had her first-year composition students enter the contest for the first time last year, and two of them won awards. Har-

ris, who had students workshop their writing, said students learn how it feels to "share your work in public venues."

CREATIVE WORK

In her class, students went through at least two drafts of their stories. "Think of it as a process," she tells them. In the end, "you have an excellent piece that you've honed." As Harris gives advice, like "start from paragraph four," she learns about some of her students' writing techniques, like nailing a conversational tone by writing a draft on the phone.

Harris says that for some students who have struggled with

writing, the subject can resonate. "They are writing as experts on their work experience," she told *Clarion*. "There is a command of the topic."

Last year, Harris's student Malessa Henry won second place for a story that she wrote about taking care of her 14-month-old child and working as a home health aide to a fellow church member paralyzed from the neck down. Henry had known "Brother T," as she calls him, when he was still able to dazzle listeners as he played piano or guitar; today he needs her help to turn his neck, to help avoid the excruciating pain that arrives if he remains in one position for too long.

PRIZE MONEY

"Sometimes in life, we think that the simplest things have no meaning," Henry told *Clarion*, reflecting on her story and how the contest helped her value the work she does. "I think taking care of Brother T is not a small thing."

Henry was elated when she found out that she won second place and with it a \$500 prize, but she had to read the email "10 times" before the win really sank in.

"I wanted to go on a shopping spree," Henry said. She's a single mother who lives with her sister and mother. "But I realized school is more important."

Contest organizers are now working on getting the word out across the University, with posters and outreach to chairs and coordinators of writing programs. Joseph Entin, chair of Brooklyn College's American Studies Program and a coordinator of this year's contest, says that every semester he asks his students how many are working while in school; every semester, most of them are. Entin says that students' work experience shapes them, and can inform their studies.

"We're a public university, a union university, a working-class university," Entin told *Clarion*. For all those reasons, he says, the Labor Arts contest is "a perfect fit for CUNY."

For more information, see laborarts.org/contest, or email Joseph Entin at jentin@brooklyn.cuny.edu.

Visual and written expression