



WHAT WE NEED FOR A SAFE REOPENING

Members organize for a safe reopening of all CUNY campuses.

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TEACHING

Reflections on remote teaching

PSC members share tips on online teaching and how to create a sense of community, as they look back on a year in the virtual classroom.

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CAMPUS

New chief at Medgar Evers

Patricia Ramsey is named president in the wake of intense faculty and student organizing against the 'toxic' leadership of former President Crew.

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Bowen's historic union legacy

Barbara Bowen stepped down as PSC president after 21 years in May, leaving a record of fierce labor activism and social justice unionism.

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COVID-19

Learning about the pandemic

Faculty at Brooklyn College devised a new course this Spring, meant to demystify many aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. They spoke about the experience.

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New leadership for PSC

By ARI PAUL

James Davis – who has served as an Executive Council member, chapter chair, delegate and all-around union activist – has been elected president of the PSC in an uncontested election.

Andrea Vásquez was reelected as first vice president. Felicia Wharton, who served as chapter chair of the Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center, was elected treasurer and Penny Lewis, who previously served as the union's vice president for the senior colleges, was elected secretary.

BROOKLYN LEADER

Davis is a professor of English at Brooklyn College and has been with the college since 2003. He has been a consistent leader for the union, engaging in political fights and leading rallies from Albany to the New York City Council, while also working at the grassroots level to develop the Brooklyn College chapter as one of the most organized and active in the union. He organized against tuition hikes and for keeping military recruiters off campus. He said that he hopes to continue to push for the New Deal for CUNY and fight for safety during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

"Some of our priorities must be won at the bargaining table and I am eager to build in the next round of negotiations on the gains we achieved in past contracts," Davis said. "Others can be pursued outside the contract, and the New Deal for CUNY represents a critical – and winnable – set of priorities: a legislative campaign for common-good demands.

"The many challenges of the past year compelled us to broaden and deepen our work as a union. I'm looking to enhance the PSC's relationship with our state and national education affiliates, labor organizations and coalition partners in the CUNY Rising Alliance. Out of the violence and distress of the past year, new alignments and movements have emerged that present real openings for an active PSC to contest the austerity politics that have punished the communities we serve and to achieve a flourishing public university and CUNY workforce," said Davis.

LEGISLATIVE CHIEF

For the last three years, Vásquez, who previously served on the Executive Council and as the chapter chair for HEOs, has served in the union's Number Two position, playing a key role in political negotiations between the union and Albany and in forming progressive political alliances to demand fair funding for CUNY. She has also been a central figure in retaining membership after the anti-union *Janus* Supreme Court decision, which barred public-sector unions from collecting agency shop fees.

"Here we are, still in the midst of a global pandemic and having to battle on every front for the health, rights and benefits of our members and our students," she said. "I'm

Activists leading the union



James Davis, president

eager to work with members about what we can do, but I also seek to expand our legislative and coalition work. We cannot build the power we need if we don't have strong student, community and union allies... and a changed Albany. The New Deal for CUNY legislation made a splash this year and it should be at the core of our vision and of our coalition work next year. We won some new taxes on the wealthy, but there's a long way to go for us to be able to transform CUNY," said Vásquez.

EOC MATHEMATICIAN

Wharton, a lecturer at SUNY Brooklyn Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) who has also

taught mathematics at City Tech, has studied the challenges students and teachers face in adult mathematics education. Wharton brings a unique perspective to the PSC leadership, as she will be the first member from an EOC chapter to serve as a principal officer. She continues the PSC tradition of having a trained mathematician oversee the union's finances.

"As a member of an EOC unit, I became intrigued by the supplemental agreement in the PSC-CUNY collective bargaining agreement covering the four EOCs: Brooklyn, Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens. In the summer of 2013, I took a giant leap, formed a slate, and reactivated



Penny Lewis, secretary



Andrea Vásquez, first vice president

ed the chapter at BEOC," Wharton said. "As the incoming treasurer, my focus is to continue to fight for equity and fair pay, defend our contractual agreement, demand a quality education for CUNY students, and continue to align the union's financial resources to our mission: [to] benefit members and [union] priorities. As we stand together as one – and no longer isolated units – we have the power to enact change."

LABOR PROFESSOR

Lewis, an associate professor of labor studies at the CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, has been a CUNY activist since her student days at the Graduate Center. She previously served on contract bargaining committees, and her current research focuses on progressive social movements. She hopes to bring her experience as a worker educator to her new role.

"I believe that making strong unions is the most essential work we can do to redress our society's fundamental power imbalances, direct resources equitably and create democracy," she said.

A new day for the PSC

"There are a number of areas I hope to focus and work on in this new role, and space allows for a few to be named here: strategic planning; cross-title solidarity; strong chapters, and a focus on the nuts and bolts of local organizing; internal education and communication; and solidarity with students, our communities and labor. To me, these are among the essential ingredients for us to realize our ambitious vision of full funding and an excellent and free CUNY for our students, as well as our specific goals of safety in our return, an enforced contract today and a strong contract in 2023."



Felicia Wharton, treasurer

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Members question CUNY reopening

By ARI PAUL

Over the last 15 months, the trauma PSC members and the CUNY community have experienced under the global COVID pandemic has been magnified by hasty, inconsistent and, in many cases, flat-out wrong decisions by the CUNY Administration.

The decision to lay off 2,000 adjuncts, the attempt to reopen the Hunter Campus Schools while flagrantly defying basic health and safety considerations, the withholding of the 2% raise due last November, and the attempt to withhold equity raises due to Assistants to HEO and Lecturers (which the PSC defeated) stand out as prominent examples. For months, CUNY Central refused to issue guidance for what a safe return to campus would look like or how to protect the health and safety of staff and faculty who have already returned or never left.

Given the vacuum in CUNY Central leadership, the PSC tapped deep health and safety expertise within our membership to draft and publish ten standards for a safe reopening, listed on page 12 of this newspaper, along with a document detailing what implementation of each standard should look like, (see tinyurl.com/PSC-safety-standards.) At a virtual town hall hosted by the PSC in May, more than 1,500 members gathered to hear from PSC leaders and the PSC Health and Safety Watchdogs about the standards, and to ask their questions and express their concerns.

TALKING TO ADMINISTRATION

The CUNY administration has expressed appreciation for the PSC standards and has recently committed to resume preoccupancy walk-throughs with PSC members. Nevertheless, inconsistent and contradictory central decision-making continues to frustrate PSC members who want a return to teaching and serving students in-person, but insist that any return must be a safe return for everybody's sake.

After instructing colleges to prepare for roughly 20% in-person instruction in the Fall, the CUNY administration recently changed course and said colleges should plan for 60% in-person instruction on campuses in the Fall with a partial return of staff on August 2. This updated guidance is being treated by many CUNY colleges as a new mandate.

Chancellor Félix Matos Rodríguez said, "My office has made the careful decision to mark the week of August 2 as the date for staff to return to their workplaces in preparation for a more in-person Fall." To this Rodríguez added, "Faculty will follow in accordance with the academic calendar of their campus."

The chancellor, in a letter to campus administrators, said, "I'm encouraging a 60% (in person & hybrid) and 40% online flexible goal"

For safety on campuses

for the Fall. Is CUNY ready? Is this safe? How will administrators help faculty and staff receive accommodations needed for a safe return? These are a few of the questions members are asking.

Governor Andrew Cuomo announced that both CUNY and SUNY will require students who return to campus to be vaccinated, saying, "There is no factual argument against the vaccine, and there is no excuse not to get your shot." But how will that be enforced, and by whom? Does this apply to anyone coming onto campuses? Who will be required to be back on campus, and what accommodations will be made for those who may need or wish to continue working remotely?

Even before the pandemic, the union's health and safety team had concerns about old HVAC systems, out-of-order bathrooms and crowded spaces on various campuses. Union activists are spending the spring and summer studying CUNY's reopening plan and working to ensure that CUNY Central and college administrators implement the union's safe reopening standards.

While faculty and staff have been creative in adapting to remote learning during the pandemic (see story on page 4), many are eager to see a return to classrooms and campuses. The remote situation has not only been stressful for faculty, staff and students, it has not been conducive to effective teaching and learning.

"We very much want faculty and staff to provide the education students need," said PSC First Vice President Andrea Vásquez. "How will enrollment go up and graduation rates increase if we don't have small, high-quality classes offered face-to-face?"

But reopening must be done safely and prudently. David Gerwin, chapter chair at Queens College, said in an email, "While I have great sympathy for the desire to be more in-person – we all want that – in a situation that is rapidly improving... neither CUNY nor Queens College prepared a 'Plan B' for a more reopened campus. In contrast, the provost pushed chairs all last summer and into the fall to have a 'Plan B' for 25% cuts. No talk preceded this 60% decree and it makes no sense to do so during registration."

STAFF CONCERNS

For members who work regular 9-5, Monday-through-Friday schedules, like higher education officers, college laboratory technicians and librarians, these concerns ring especially true, because in typical times they spend more hours on campus than instructors.

Cindy Bink, chapter chair for HEOs, said, "College presidents need to make it very clear to HEOs when and why it is safe to fully return to campus. Evidence of upgrad-

ed ventilation systems, adequate spacing and other protective protocols should be well communicated. This will not be easy, because many HEOs experienced the poor building conditions prior to COVID and have learned not to trust CUNY building inspections. If the campuses are not safe for students and faculty, they are not safe for HEOs or others."

Bink added, "To sit in offices 35 hours a week with poor ventilation and limited access to students

makes absolutely no sense. We know there will be students who want to communicate with our offices remotely. To return HEOs full-time under these circumstances serves no one. In addition, many HEOs worry about bringing COVID back to vulnerable relatives living in their homes."

LIBRARY ISSUES

Library faculty are also concerned. Mariana Regalado, an associate librarian for information services at Brooklyn College and chair of the PSC Library Faculty Committee told *Clarion*, "While a student may spend 75 or 90 minutes in a classroom, they often spend multiple hours in CUNY libraries, so we are concerned that the emphasis on planning for classrooms may overlook our concerns about enforcing masking and social distancing, cleaning and contact tracing in the libraries."

At the May PSC virtual town hall, members brought up issues such as: "What happens when someone on campus or in my classroom tests positive for COVID?" In that case there should be a campus point-person for COVID response that one can go to. Another issue: while CUNY addresses what can be done for personnel who have a high COVID risk because of comorbidities, it falls short in addressing what can be done about other disabilities that can make COVID compliance difficult. After all, people who have hearing difficulties can't read lips through a mask. People in wheelchairs can't avoid elevators.

"Workers across titles at Lehman are concerned about being allowed to continue to work remotely if they're immunocompromised or at higher risk due to illnesses or conditions that may not fall 100% within the scope of the Americans with Disabilities Act," said PSC Lehman College Chapter Chair Robert Farrell in an email to *Clarion*. "They're also worried about their vulnerable family members who either can't be vaccinated or for whom vaccination doesn't provide enough protection. We hope that CUNY will listen to employees and allow those who need to work completely remotely for their own or their family's safety to continue to do so."

"The CUNY administration has provided minimal guidance, so every campus has developed different plans and different standards, and then CUNY has thrown whatever plans were developed into chaos

by pushing for 60% of classes to be in-person and pushing for staff to return to campuses in early August," said Sharon Utakis, the recently elected PSC vice president for community colleges. "I am fully vaccinated, and I hope that as many other PSC members as possible will be vaccinated, too, but that's not enough. Even if students are mandated to be vaccinated in order to register for in-person classes, what about students who come to campus for other reasons? And what about others who come to campus?"

FRESH AIR

Utakis, a former chapter chair at Bronx Community College, added, "Ventilation is another issue that I'm concerned about. There is a lot of variation among buildings across CUNY and even across individual campuses. Some have modern HVAC systems that can be outfitted to comply with ventilation guidelines, but others don't. While it may not be true on every campus, on some campuses, including my own, the administration seems more concerned about getting people into classrooms and offices than about whether those workspaces are safe."

While PSC's guidance to the CUNY community has helped, members still have concerns that CUNY Central has failed to address. The union is doing everything in its power to ensure a safe return.

Shomial Ahmad contributed to the reporting of this story.

Fighting for federal and city funds

By ARI PAUL

PSC's fight to fund CUNY continues on several fronts, including averting budget cuts at the city level and insisting that colleges use some of the \$891 million in federal stimulus funds from its coffers to serve students.

In April, more than 200 PSC members, students and supporters gathered in Midtown Manhattan to march from the Graduate Center to Governor Andrew Cuomo's of-

fice and the CUNY Central Office to demand that colleges "free the funds" and use federal aid monies in hand to reverse the past year's

Cuts at the city level

layoffs and ensure a safe reopening for colleges. These colleges, the PSC said, have the power and the funds to bring back laid-off adjuncts and to make the necessary upgrades and repairs for a safe reopening this Fall. (See college-by-college allocations here: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/stimulus-funds-cuny>.)

The union is fighting Mayor Bill de Blasio's proposed city budget, which slashes \$67 million of the city's CUNY funding. In a virtual rally on May 21, Barbara Bowen, in one of her last acts as PSC president, blasted the mayor's proposed cuts to CUNY, noting they were originally included in the mayor's preliminary budget before federal stimulus money came through, but conspicuously remain even after the addition of federal funds.

RADICAL DISINVESTMENT

Bowen said in her testimony, "This is a radical disinvestment in CUNY and will do the opposite of driving economic growth and educational justice."

Juvanie Piquant, the University Student Senate chair and the student member of the CUNY Board of Trustees, said "It's slap in the face to the CUNY community."

Scott Cally, the PSC chapter chair at Kingsborough Community College, said that the cuts will mean fewer supplies and a reduction of staff and faculty through attrition, saying, "The deep cuts would devastate community colleges...perhaps permanently."



Members marched for the release of federal funds.

Teaching in a pandemic, a year later

By CLARION STAFF

CUNY faculty members now have a full academic year of remote teaching under their belts. When the pandemic first forced the city into lockdown in March 2020, the thought of virtual teaching seemed like a temporary emergency measure.

But it's now more than a year later. And while PSC members are getting vaccinated and CUNY Central is adamant about returning to in-person learning in the fall, the "new normal" has been virtual learning for the past year, with faculty deciding what method of teaching works best for them and their students. In the following feature, members speak to *Clarion's* Shomial Ahmad about how they structured their classes and their semester in a way that built shared classroom experiences in order to meet course goals.

Shakespeare online

I learned a lot really quickly in order to teach my classes asynchronously. It helped that I had already planned to teach an online Shakespeare course – one of my mad hat ideas from long before the shutdown. Shakespeare does not sound like a class that you can teach asynchronously online, but it's worked enormously well.

Why? Shakespeare is a visual medium. When they can watch an actor interpret a character's words, students connect more empathetically with the drama, and they better understand the poetry. Lectures are therefore interspersed with performances of relevant scenes, provided by such resources as the Royal Shakespeare Company, Globe Theatre and Folger Shakespeare Library.

My class is organized as weekly units posted to Blackboard. It's a best practice to corral material in one folder to avoid excess clicking. Written instructions explain how students should proceed through the week's materials. These are followed by the assigned reading, study guides, lectures and performance excerpts, and finally, the assigned writing. I record and embed thematically organized mini lectures, usually less than 10 minutes in length. One video may be about Hamlet's grief, and the next about Hamlet and Ophelia. Short lectures are easier for me to edit, and they allow students to easily budget time. If a student has a ten-minute break, they can watch a video.

I'm surprised by how well this works. My students have submitted thoughtful discussion posts and well-crafted paper drafts; they're clearly thinking and appreciating the material. When they're stuck, they're not shy to visit me in virtual office hours. I don't think it's a single intervention that makes the difference, but creating a reliable structure is enormously helpful.

Concrete lessons from virtual classes



In order to sustain a classroom community when Carrie Conners moved her Introduction to Creative Writing class at LaGuardia Community College online in the Spring of 2020, Conners had her students write a collaborative poem "Out the window, I've seen." *Clarion* commissioned the above illustration based on the final lines of the poem. To read about the collaborative writing project, visit tinyurl.com/collaborative-writing-project and read the full poem at tinyurl.com/out-the-window-poem.

Students can then focus on mastering the course content over navigating the technology.

VICTORIA MUÑOZ

Assistant Professor
English Department
Hostos Community College

Numbers game

I teach my Math for Elementary Education with Algebra class asynchronously. I try to create community through weekly discussions, whether it's a reading reflection or a problem-solving exercise. I do group activities so students are working together to create in-

formation as a community. The big challenge is getting them out there to just try so I'm constantly sending emails, encouraging students to share in the discussion.

I am using open educational resource (OER) videos developed by one of my colleagues whose approach is similar to mine. I scour the internet for resources: fun math raps, songs to help them memorize the quadratic formula, strategies for graphing a slope, math history or math in other cultures. It is good to have the videos under 10 minutes; attention spans are not long. I'm not testing because proctoring virtually is impossible.

I have office hours over Zoom, where I'll meet with a student or a

small group. I break down the grade with weekly discussions, group projects, homework, drill and skill activities, reflective blog/journal posts and a final portfolio, where students unpack five of their learning tasks and expand on how the concepts work and how they would teach them.

In a blog assignment, students research and write about the Asian origins of math concepts; some examples are Fibonacci numbers in Hindu culture, poetry and music, the Asian roots of algebra or the origin of the Pascal's triangle in China. Some students have submitted really nice projects. It's a good feeling when I know that the students will

do good work in their own classrooms with their own students.

SARAH MCALLISTER

Assistant Professor
Department of Mathematics
Borough of Manhattan
Community College

Building community

When we first transitioned to distance learning last March, I had two concerns about my classes: that they remain engaging and that they simulate an in-person environment as much as possible. I decided to use many of the same technological tools that I had been using in-person.

Attendance is taken digitally through Mentimeter, mini lectures are presented via PowerPoint or Google Slides, course material is posted on Blackboard and Google Classroom, and in-class assignments are conducted in groups via the Google Suite of Apps for Education. With so many different technological options available, the conscious decision to use these applications was to lessen any potential learning curve to the technology's use at a distance, which provided students with an extra sense of comfort and certainty in their ability to use the technology.

The obvious change of meeting in a Zoom room rather than a room on campus provided its challenges in building a sense of community. In an effort to alleviate some of the stress that comes with participating in an online course, I open each class session asking students how they are feeling, what challenges they are facing, and if they have any updates they want to share with the class. Students have expressed that this time talking with their peers made them feel more comfortable in the class as well as feel that their voices were being heard during this incredibly difficult time.

As part of ensuring the class is engaging, I make an effort to change the task the class is working on regularly and not spend too much time on any one presentation or assignment. Whether it is a small group activity, full class discussion or in-class assignment to engage with the material covered in class, the switching of tasks helps to prevent Zoom fatigue.

SALVATORE GAROFALO

Lecturer
Secondary Education and Youth
Services Department
Queens College

Benefits achieved

To my surprise, there have been some remarkable benefits in teaching acting online as a hybrid, part synchronous, part asynchronous course.

Continued on page 9

MEC faculty welcome new president

By ARI PAUL

Patricia Ramsey, a biologist previously in leadership positions at Lincoln University and Bowie State University, has been appointed the new president of Medgar Evers College (MEC). Ramsey will be the first woman president of the college, an appointment many at MEC are heralding as a sign of progress.

The announcement marks a new chapter for the Brooklyn college following the abrupt resignation of former President Rudy Crew amid a whirlwind of controversy surrounding his leadership and calls from some at MEC and the greater community to step down.

Myrlie Evers-Williams, the widow of the civil rights leader for whom the campus is named, applauded the new appointment, saying, “My daughter Reena Evers-Everette was honored to have been a member of the presidential search committee, which was totally committed to bringing the best to Medgar Evers College. Dr. Ramsey is a passionate, courageous and innovative educator with a well-established track record of inspiring students, faculty and administration at historically Black colleges and universities.”

Evers-Williams had joined several MEC activists in calling for Crew’s immediate ouster for what they cited as a record of administrative mismanagement and a culture of fear.

ELATED

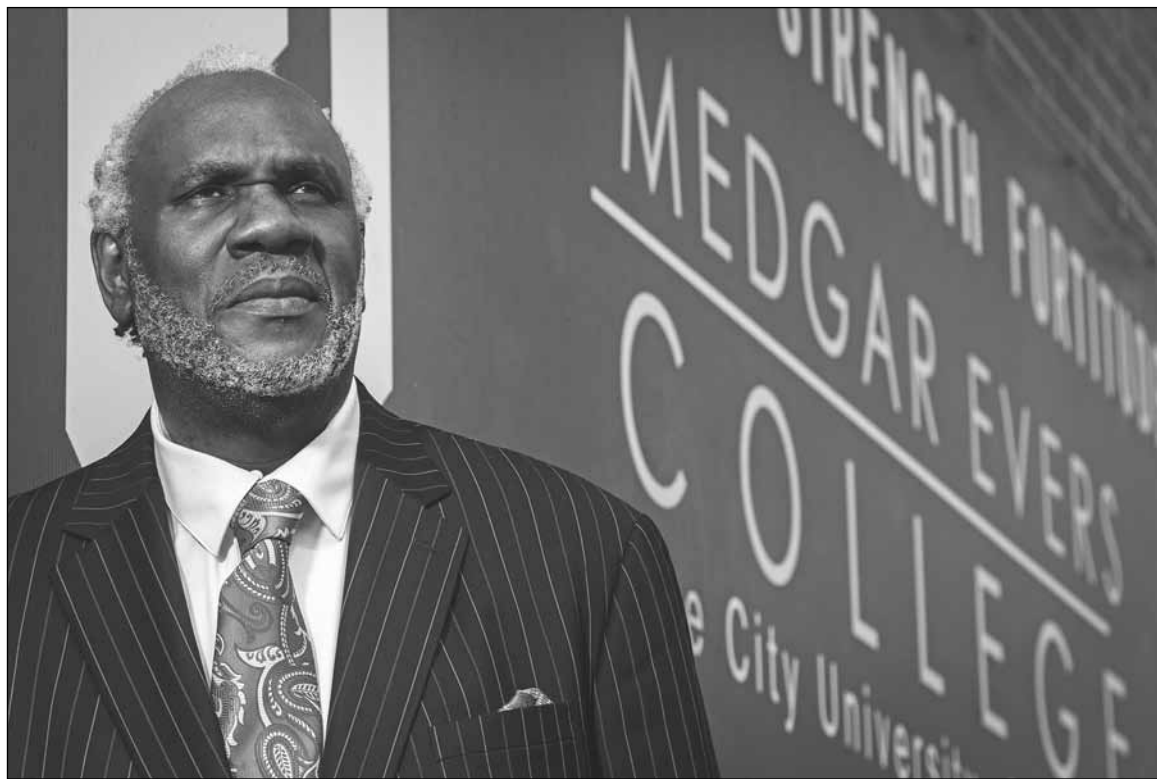
“I am elated at this historic time and new day for this unique and special institution,” said Zulema Blair, chair of the public administration department and the vice chair of the MEC College Council. “It comes at a time when racial justice is being placed front and center for all public policy platforms on all levels of government and I am sure that [the] MEC and the Central Brooklyn community under the leadership of Dr. Patricia Ramsey will once again realize its true potential and exceed all expectations.”

Blair, who was highly critical of Crew’s leadership, added, “My colleagues and I are ready to work on behalf of the faculty, staff and students” with the new leadership. She said the college community has “worked tirelessly for our voices to be heard and finally they were heard.”

Clinton Crawford, the PSC chapter chair at MEC, exclaimed upon hearing of Ramsey’s appointment, “It’s about damn time.” He then added, “We look forward to the next, best chapter in the history of Medgar Evers College.”

And Kathleen Barker, the chair of the MEC Faculty Senate and a professor of psychology, saw an opportunity to rebuild trust between the faculty and the administration. “We look forward to reinstituting shared governance at the college and to

Crew resigns after intense pressure



Owen Brown, an MEC professor, called for Crew’s resignation, describing Crew’s leadership as creating a ‘toxic environment.’

the vital faculty and staff dialogue in the near future with incoming President Ramsey,” she said.

Owen Brown, a professor of sociology who called for Crew’s resignation in a *Daily News* op-ed last summer, told *Clarion* that he was very hopeful the new president would help “change the culture of the college and empower it so we can realize our potential.”

A big issue for the college under Crew that Ramsey will need to address is accountability, Brown said. The college suffered, he explained, from a problem where executives who underperformed but were loyal to Crew were promoted, while faculty members

“who were adding value to the college were disciplined because they didn’t toe the party line.” This created what Brown called a “toxic environment” where “budgets for services [were] being slashed” while the college continued “hiring individuals in executive level positions who were not bringing in resources that could help to provide the services to the students that the college is supposed to provide.”

REHIRING ADJUNCTS

Brown expressed confidence that Ramsey would address this problem. “I’m hopeful that she’ll be able to tackle this and I am willing – and other colleagues are willing – to provide assistance to her in this matter.”

Two of the biggest labor issues Ramsey will face at MEC are the PSC’s demand to rehire laid-off MEC adjuncts and address the issue of ballooning class sizes. Recently, PSC activists delivered a petition to the MEC administration and Crew demanding that the college reap-

point all 66 teaching adjuncts eligible for new or renewed three-year appointments. The petition also called for reducing the maximum class size to the Spring 2020 level of 28 students.

CUNY said of Ramsey in a statement, “At Bowie State, she started weekly ‘Chat with the Provost’ sessions that became a valuable incubator of student-originated

ideas that were later adopted by the university. Dr. Ramsey also played major roles in diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. At Lincoln University, she oversaw a new office of equity and inclusion that advanced recruitment efforts, and under her leadership the university increased the number of women faculty across five academic departments in disciplines

where females are traditionally underrepresented.”

The biggest critics of Crew – who once served as schools chancellor under Mayor Rudy Giuliani – noted that MEC was marred by favoritism and cronyism under his management, leading to a culture of fear that made it nearly impossible for faculty, staff and students to speak out about the problems they perceived on campus. It was assumed that Crew was leaving at the end of the 2019–2020 academic year for a superintendent job at the DeKalb County School District in Atlanta, but after he was abruptly rejected by the Atlanta school board, he vowed to stay on at MEC until the end of the 2020–21 academic year.

SUPPORT FOR CREW

Some faculty, however, believe the criticism of Crew’s leadership was too harsh, and that he led an underfunded college as well as possible under the circumstances. Some even say he left behind a positive legacy. Chinyere Emmanuel Egbe, chair of the economics and finance department, credited Crew with expanding educational facilities at the college.

“Overall reading skills increased from 82% to 86%,” he said. “Overall academic proficiency increased from 29% in 2014 to 61% in summer 2020.”

Ramsey said in a statement, “During these times of heightened awareness of social justice issues, I have the unique opportunity to lead Medgar Evers College, an institution with social justice in its DNA.”

Solidarity with NYU grad workers



PSC rallied in solidarity with the New York University graduate student workers in May on strike for better wages, health care, and childcare benefits.

ACTIVIST LEADER MOVES ON

Barbara Bowen's two decades

As she stepped down from office at the end of May, Barbara Bowen sent a message to PSC members expressing her thanks for their vision and commitment. An adapted version of her message is below:

Thank you for entrusting me with the leadership of the union. It has been the privilege of a lifetime. When the current leadership first took office in 2000, our aim was to make the PSC a fighting union. Thanks to you, individually and collectively, that's what the PSC has become. We just saw an edgy demonstration by the Brooklyn PSC chapter about spending federal stimulus funds and a demonstration planned for next week at the Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC). PSC members and students protested at BMCC on June 1 against racist austerity, CUNY's failure to rehire laid-off adjuncts, and the racist defacement of a college building. These events come after a PSC town hall on reopening in April that drew 1,500 participants and the release of the union's detailed COVID safety standards.

ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

None of these actions would have been possible without an active membership. What I love about the union we have built together is that members have risked investing some part of their political hope – whether for a better university, a better city or even a better world – in the work of the union. All a leader of such a union can do is try to be worthy of people in struggle.

In a historical period of anti-worker organizing and obscene income inequality, the PSC was strong at the bargaining table because we did not limit our horizon to bargaining. We refused to accept that subpar working conditions for staff and



Barbara Bowen led many contract campaigns, resulting in big wins for the membership that last today.

faculty are inevitable at an institution that serves primarily people of color, the working class and the poor. We challenged the racist austerity policies that underlie our working conditions and understood the fight for a contract as a fight for our students' right to a beautiful, imaginative, life-changing education.

As a result, we were able to break years of contractual stalemate and win salary

increases, paid parental leave, increased sabbatical pay, targeted raises to address inequities of race and gender, health insurance for adjuncts, professional staff salary differentials, paid adjunct office hours, junior faculty research leave, professional development funds, graduate employee health insurance, dedicated sick leave, improvements in the reclassification system, gains in annual leave, a reduction in the

teaching load, three-year appointments for adjuncts and more. Through the power of an organized membership, we were able to save the Welfare Fund from near-insolvency, and the Fund has now been able to enhance dental, prescription drug and vision benefits.

The PSC unapologetically asserted that unions are strongest when they work in the interest of all workers and their communities, not just of their own members. PSC members defeated a half-billion-dollar cut to CUNY imposed by Governor Andrew Cuomo in 2016 and responded by advancing our own agenda for funding CUNY. We worked with students and their communities to develop the New Deal for CUNY, legislation that reinstates free tuition, repudiates austerity, and dramatically increases the University's public funding. Over the last six months. The New Deal for CUNY has ignited support in Albany, and an equally ambitious proposal for New York City is rapidly gaining ground. It calls for payments in lieu of taxes from the rich untaxed private universities, with the income dedicated to supporting CUNY.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

At the same time, PSC members pushed our national union to reverse its support for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; campaigned against stop-and-frisk, against racist travel bans and for the rights of undocumented students; supported teachers' and workers' struggles in this country and internationally; defended academic freedom; and worked to keep our students and each other safe during this traumatic year.

Anyone who steps down from leadership, however, must be sharply aware of what



Barbara Bowen, oftentimes in coalition with CUNY student leaders, spoke out about student issues.

Dave Sanders

Building a 'fighting u

es of PSC leadership

A legacy of progress



Barbara Bowen led the union through some tough times, including several years of stalled contract talks with CUNY.



Bowen was one many members arrested for civil disobedience at the state capitol, demanding a reversal of budget cuts.

has been left undone. Although the PSC has defeated the worst austerity proposals in Albany and won new funds, CUNY is still desperately, deliberately underfunded. And although the PSC achieved major gains against the exploitation of adjunct labor, we have not yet won full pay parity and job security for CUNY's teaching majority, its adjunct faculty. CUNY management continues to race towards increasing contingency, and we are still in a fight to restore the positions of the adjuncts CUNY preemptively laid off last spring.

What gives me hope, though, is our membership and the stirrings of political change. Consider the extraordinary way the entire faculty and staff transformed our work in a matter of days to keep CUNY going during the pandemic; the hundreds of members who have been trained by other members to monitor the safety of their own workplaces; the outpouring of members joining anti-racist protests last summer and organizing anti-racism coalitions on the campuses; the thousands of members who have rallied, marched, petitioned, testified and risked arrest in PSC actions; the members whose artwork and anger have fueled the recent demonstrations to free the federal funds and reject racialized austerity.

LOOKING AHEAD

A year ago I would not have imagined that the New York State budget would include \$2 billion for undocumented essential workers, achieved largely through a tax increase on the rich. Nor would I have predicted federal stimulus funding in the billions of dollars for higher education. And few observers foresaw that the structural inequities laid bare by the pandemic, together with the murder of George Floyd, would spark a massive, sustained, worldwide demand to abolish racism.

The coming years may see new openings for political change, and I believe the PSC is in a position to contribute to and expand those openings. We have a membership with imagination and courage, and a new leadership ready to make the possible real. James Davis, Andrea Vásquez, Felicia Wharton and Penny Lewis come to their positions with proven success as leaders and organizers for the current political moment – they bring intelligence, commitment

and strategic sophistication. I wish them joy in the work.

And I thank the staff of the PSC, who work their hearts out every day for our members, and the principal officers who have served with me in PSC leadership: Steve London, Mike Fabricant, Cecelia McCall, John Hyland, Arthurine DeSola, and my sisterhood for the past term – Andrea Vásquez, Sharon Persinger and Nivedita Majumdar. Only they know how much I owe them.

Thank you, PSC members, for your generosity to me and each other, for your challenges, your criticisms and your hope. I'll see you in the fight.

In a series of five contracts for which Bowen was chief negotiator, PSC power increased salaries and benefits across the board, lifted pay for the lowest paid, added benefits and pay for part-time employees and introduced changes many had thought impossible to achieve at CUNY. Highlights of the union's gains include:

- Salary increases for all titles
- Dramatic improvements in PSC-CUNY Welfare Fund benefits: vision, dental, prescription drug, and more
- A series of additional "equity raises" for lowest-paid titles, targeted at salary inequities of race and gender
- Sabbaticals at 80% pay
- Adjunct health insurance
- Establishment of graduate employee health insurance and tuition waivers
- Establishment of a professional development fund for HEOs and CLTs
- Professional development fund for adjuncts and Continuing Ed faculty
- Paid sick days for adjunct CLTs and non-teaching adjuncts
- Protection of Continuing Ed faculty
- Creation of hundreds of full-time positions reserved for current adjuncts
- Pay differentials for CLTs and Assistants to HEO with master's and doctoral degrees
- Paid parental leave for all full-time staff and faculty—the first won by any public-sector union in New York
- A dramatic increase in adjunct faculty pay, including paid office hours
- Major gain in annual leave equity for full-time faculty librarians
- Restoration of annual leave days for Counselors
- HEO salary differentials and improvements in HEO reclassification
- 24 hours of reassigned time for untenured full-time faculty for research
- Professional Development Funds and Research Awards
- Teaching load reduction for full-time faculty by three hours



The first PSC parents to enjoy union-won parental leave.

union' at the PSC

Persinger reflects on six-year term

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

Sharon Persinger stepped down in May after two terms as PSC treasurer. She is no stranger to numbers or to unions. The associate professor of mathematics and computer science at Bronx Community College (BCC) grew up in West Virginia, the granddaughter of unionized coal miners from a working-class family. For her, the multimillion dollar PSC budget is more than a collection of numbers. It is “the infrastructure,” comprised primarily of members’ dues, that makes the union work.

“That’s the foundation of unions to improve the terms and conditions of employment for the people they represent,” she said. “In a union like ours, a lot of that [infrastructure] is connected. Our terms and conditions are our students’ learning conditions.”

BACKBONE OF THE UNION

The budget pays for the staff to support members, union campaigns, and the collective bargaining that wins our raises, time off and other contractual benefits. The budget underwrites the union’s advocacy in the state house and in city hall, where CUNY (and thus PSC contracts) are jointly funded. The budget, as many union leaders have said, is a “moral” and “political” document, because it is a declara-

Budgets and collective actions



Sharon Persinger, former PSC Treasurer

tion of the goals the union believes are important enough to fight for.

As treasurer, Persinger was the public face of the union’s finances, explaining at delegate assembly how the PSC spends its money.

“Accounting is about categorization, and it is about telling a story

of the finances of the organization by looking at the finances with a lot of different lenses,” Persinger said. “There is looking at them in one day, looking at them over a year, and dividing money in pools – the money that comes in and the money that goes out.”

Persinger stepped into her role during uncertain times for the union, and uncertainty would remain a constant of her tenure: court cases that aimed to shrink the power of public sector unions, including the *Janus v AFSCME* decision that allowed public employees represented by a union to refuse to pay agency fees and, recently, the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic, which brought health and safety concerns into stark relief for a university system already plagued with serious health and safety issues.

BRACING FOR LOST DUES

As treasurer, Persinger estimated how much revenue the union would lose because of the *Janus* decision. She, along with union staff, devised a retro pay calculator to help members estimate the amount of money they would get after six years without a contract. She explained the budget with the foundational support of the union’s finance director, Faye Alladin, who manages the day-to-day details of the union’s finances. She also helped negotiate a side agreement on online teaching observations with CUNY, reinserting crucial language that was lost in a draft agreement. And she was involved in the collective decision-making that powered the union’s campaigns.

One protest that Persinger said she will always remember is standing outside the U.S. Supreme Court the day the high court justices heard the oral arguments in the *Janus* case. She rode a bus, along with other PSC members, to Washington, DC. Together, with a PSC contingent, she stood outside with fellow union members – teachers, bus drivers, social workers and other public sector workers.

“I honestly think that we all knew that we were going to lose it because of how the composition of the court had changed,” Persinger recalled. “But we made it very clear that it was a battle that we were going to continue to fight. We knew how to fight it, and that was by building up our membership.”

UNION SISTERHOOD

Persinger will return to teaching at BCC, but will also serve on the PSC Executive Council as a university-wide officer. While she looks forward to having the summers “off,” she said she will miss being a part of the day-to-day collective decision-making at the union.

“There was a sisterhood,” said Persinger, describing the last three years of her tenure where all four principal officers at the PSC were women. “There was real comradeship and mutual support.”

Activism in the streets, power at the contract table

By ARI PAUL

Nivedita Majumdar wants members to know that although she has stepped down as PSC secretary after two terms, the lifelong activist and trade unionist isn’t going far. When she returns to her post as an associate professor of English at John Jay College, she expects to be an active rank-and-file member, continuing the battle against austerity she waged as a principal officer and, before that, as a chapter chair and delegate.

ACTIVIST

“It is a matter of deep satisfaction to me that the period of my six years as principal officer was arguably among the most eventful and exciting periods in the union’s history,” she said. “First, we did not just survive, but thrived after the ugly, reactionary attack on the union movement in the form of the *Janus* decision in 2018,” said Majumdar, adding that even since the Supreme Court ruling forbade the collection of agency shop fees by unions, PSC membership among full-timers has remained at about 95%.

She also took pride in the union’s strike authorization vote in 2016, in the face of the no-strike language of the New York State’s Taylor Law.

Majumdar looks back

“It was a mammoth task to organize our 27,000 members for the vote, around half of whom had contingent employment. But we took on the task because of the university’s failure to make an acceptable economic offer after five years without a contract,” Majumdar said.

“More than 1,000 PSC members were trained by union staff and leaders to hold one-on-one conversations with members, to listen to their perspectives while both assessing and promoting strike readiness. Conversations with members were complemented with chapter meetings, organizing department chairs to commit to non-retaliation should their colleagues strike, and working with CUNY students to organize support for a possible strike. In the strike authorization vote, 92% voted ‘Yes,’ risking personal financial loss and heavy penalties to their union,” she said.

Majumdar told *Clarion* that while she is proud of many of the contract gains under the previous administration (see page 7), she hopes that the administration under Barbara Bowen set a standard for militant unionism that goes beyond contract fights.

Organizing for a better university and city

“We’ve always believed that the source of our strength is not skillful negotiations in the boardroom – though that is certainly necessary – but the power we amass through organizing and fighting on the streets and on campuses,” she said.

“Union stalwarts like Mike Fabricant helped expand our power through coalitions with civic groups and bodies that share our vision of an egalitarian and robust university and city. CUNY Rising is a product of that vision and will have a lasting impact on our future struggles. Under Barbara Bowen’s leadership, the union tested the outer limits of what a single union can achieve in a hostile political climate. A more fundamental transformation of our work conditions will require a class-wide movement.”

BACK IN THE FIELD

Majumdar looks forward not just to union activism at the local level but returning to her academic work. She recently wrote *The World in a Grain of Sand* (Verso), a “critique of dominant culture theories from a broadly Marxist perspective.”

“I’m very excited to go back to teaching and developing new courses,” Majumdar said. “It feels really great to have spent six years in central leadership and to now return to chapter work. The organic connection of rank-and-file activism and leadership is the strength of our union, so it is wonderful to be actually doing both.”

Looking back on the experience, she voiced optimism for the new leadership, but offered some advice about the tough roads ahead.

“I witnessed firsthand the back-breaking work and the vigilance it takes to cost a contract because every decimal point carries the potential of changing some lives,” she said.



Nivedita Majumdar, former PSC Secretary

Teaching the COVID pandemic

By MAURIZIO GUERRERO

In both the Fall and Spring semesters, the Brooklyn College department of health and nutrition sciences offered a class on the COVID-19 pandemic – with input from many different instructors – to counter the spread of misinformation about the coronavirus and vaccination among undergraduates.

The faculty did not expect to learn as much as the students, but in the end, they learned a lot about how to reach out to a population, mostly of color, during a pandemic that has disproportionately ravaged communities of color. Nearly 65% of Brooklyn College students identify as people of color at a school where the majority (55%) of the faculty is white.

“I came up with the idea because I saw how much misinformation and disinformation about COVID-19 people were exposed to,” said Michele Greene, professor and deputy chair in the department of health and nutrition sciences at Brooklyn College. “I was concerned that our students, their families, their communities were not getting the right information.”

A TEAM EFFORT

The course involved 13 professors from health and nutrition sciences and the CUNY Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy. It covers topics such as the history of pandemics, infectious diseases and virology, social determinants

Facing history, stopping disinfo



Jolanta Kruszelnicka at a mobile COVID-19 testing site in lower Manhattan.

of health and testing, tracing and vaccination. It attracted 26 students in the 2020 Fall semester and 37 this Spring.

“We did a poll in the class and found out that a lot of students, even

after seven weeks into the semester, were still not willing to get the vaccine or have lots of questions about the vaccines,” said Greene.

The history of medical abuses endured by people of color in the

United States is a long one. The Tuskegee experiments let Black men die untreated from syphilis for four decades until 1972. Marion Sims, “the father of modern gynecology,” perfected his surgical procedures on Black women without anesthesia.

SKEPTICISM

In 2020, it was revealed that numerous migrant women from Latin America in the Irwin County Detention Center in Georgia received forced hysterectomies – sterilization procedures – without their knowledge.

“Students have every reason to be skeptical of the medical care system,” said Greene.

According to the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment at CUNY, three in five undergraduates are from households with annual incomes of less than \$30,000.

The pandemic has only multiplied such stressors, showed a study published last February by CUNY’s Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy. Nearly 55% of the students reported anxiety or depression; 49% needed mental health services; 81 respondents lost household income; and half worried about losing housing.

In the middle of such a crisis, with so much misinformation on social media, it is natural for students to question vaccination, said Jolanta Kruszelnicka, a lecturer in health

and nutrition sciences who coordinates the course.

“It is understandable that when you have a new disease and scientists are not able to provide satisfactory answers to all the questions, people will try to come up with the answers by themselves,” said Kruszelnicka.

Margrethe Horlyck-Romanovsky, an assistant professor co-teaching the course, estimated that roughly

Faculty bring history and science together.

40% of the students were unwilling to be vaccinated.

“All of the fear and the hesitation, all of the conspiracy theories emerge, we know, in situations like this. So, it was important to acknowledge that this is not new,” Horlyck-Romanovsky said. “Our

fear of totalitarian measures is not new, but the message to overcome it is the same.” That is, she added, building trust.

ANTIESTABLISHMENT

Students’ skepticism has to do with the safety of medical products rushed into development, Horlyck-Romanovsky said. Students also mistrust the medical establishment, particularly the pharmaceuticals – for-profit oligopolies now entrusted with saving millions of lives.

According to a Pew Research Center survey published this past March, 61% of Black Americans said they would definitely or probably get a COVID vaccine, which is less than the national average of 69%. The study also revealed that older Black adults are more inclined than younger adults to say they would get a vaccine.

During the course, Greene shows a clip that encourages vaccine confidence from a group called Hip Hop Public Health, founded by two notable Black Americans: Olajide Williams, chief of staff and neurology professor at Columbia University, and the hip hop artist Doug E. Fresh.

BUILDING TRUST

“One of the things about health information is that people are generally more trusting of individuals who look like them,” said Greene. Yet, students rightly pointed out that all the characters getting vaccinated in the clip were Black, none of them white.

“Something intended to help build trust in the students was interpreted in a different way,” said Greene. “It taught me that we have to pay even closer attention to how students learn about the pandemic.”

Horlyck-Romanovsky described her own learning with ambivalence: “I learned that what I was trained to do was really valuable, but that we have failed to prepare our society for this catastrophe,” she said. “We knew that it was not just a possibility, we knew it was going to happen at some point.”

Teaching in a pandemic

Continued from page 4

Theater provides audiences with a sense of connection – with each other and with the actors on stage. While the online platform may seem antithetical to the art of theater making, it can indeed provide a focused and intimate personal experience. For example, discussion boards have offered students who might normally be insecure to voice ideas in a large group, an opportunity to engage in dialogue with fellow peers.

To make the most out of the virtual platform, I divided my acting classes up into two distinct “parts” for each week of instruction. In the first, I would meet with the whole class. During this session, students would present monologues and respond to each other’s work. In the second session, I would divide up what would be normally the second class meeting of the week into smaller 15-minute sections. During this time, the smaller group sizes allowed for students to receive more detailed instruction and more specific peer-led feedback. It was during these smaller sections where students really seemed to experi-

ence a deeper connection to each other and the work.

At some point early on in an acting student’s training, they will be assigned a monologue: a particular kind of performance where an actor is creating the illusion that they are speaking to another being, who, in most cases, is in fact not on stage. The actor is, in essence, talking to a spot on the wall. Conducting this exercise via Zoom turns out to be an excellent means in which to reinforce the concept of “talking to a spot on the wall!”

Consistent virtual office hours with a link to these meetings readily available in my e-signature and on my Blackboard page, also proved invaluable. I also maintained weekly reflection questions on Blackboard, where students would respond to short writing prompts and discuss ideas with each other. These prompts were essential, as they provided a way for the students to stay connected to the material during the time between full class meetings.

During my time teaching acting online, I have observed students more clearly articulating their understanding of the basic concepts

of acting. This, I believe, is largely due to the smaller group meetings, which allowed students more opportunities to collaborate in a safe environment with fellow classmates. Good theater is made through healthy collaboration; teaching acting online reinforces this idea.

PAUL RICCIARDI

Associate Professor
Department of Communications
and Performing Arts
Kingsborough Community
College

Graduate level

My graduate-level classes last around two hours, with eight to 20 students in each class. Even with smaller classes than a typical CUNY undergraduate class, I encounter some of the same issues when teaching virtually.

It’s important to create a sense of community among the students and them with me. I’ve encouraged students to make an appointment to see me in person over Zoom for my “office hours.” I’ve also opened the Zoom class sessions 15 minutes early and stayed on at least 15 minutes after class ends to encourage my students to chat informally with me or with each other.

PSC contract team, in overdrive

By SHOMIAL AHMAD

The union contract is a living document – it is not a mere collection of words on pages of paper, but rather a set of articles organized around workplace principles that is negotiated, enforced, defended and subject to constant reexamination. At the PSC, the contract enforcement department – a team of PSC staff and rank-and-file members trained in the nitty-gritty details of the contract – work to defend members’ rights every day.

“I talk about collectively bargained agreements as organic. They are

Working hard for the hardworking

living organisms, and as such, are constantly changing and being understood in new and different ways,” said Renée Lasher, PSC’s director of contract administration since 2018. “No contract ever captures all the details, so there are always going to be things that have to be wrangled out as things are put into practice.”

BUSY TIMES

Over the past year during the COVID crisis, the contract administration department has been working

in overdrive to understand the contract in new and different ways to address remote work, life-altering health and safety issues at CUNY campuses and the mass layoffs of adjuncts.

“The shutdown impacts every aspect of work that our members do. It impacts how they communicate both internally and externally,” said Lasher, who worked for a decade in union representation in the entertainment trades before joining

PSC’s contract enforcement team. Grievance representatives have been responding to the issues and figuring out how to navigate the work terrain whether it involve talking to members one-on-one, identifying issues for impact bargaining or filing both individual or class action grievances (when a certain issue is pervasive and affects members across campuses).

When 300 adjuncts who were eligible for three-year appointments were arbitrarily laid off in the Spring of 2020 and when around 2,000 adjuncts who were on semester and one-year appointments were non-reappointed, the union filed class action grievances. The union made arguments to a CUNY hearing officer in both of these grievances, but CUNY has failed to issue any decisions within the time frame given them under the contract, so both grievances have been filed to arbitration, where neutral arbitrators outside of CUNY will hear the cases separately. (For an explanation of the grievance process, see the illustrations, starting on this page.)

Understanding the contract in new and different ways

experience. (For a list of grievance representatives, go to psc-cuny.org/who-we-are/grievance-counselors.)

Faye Moore joined the PSC in 2018 as a contract administration coordinator. She is a former president and vice president of grievances of Social Service Employees Union Local 371 – one of the largest locals in District Council 37, where she bargained contracts with the city and dealt with grievances, legal issues and organizing for nearly every New York City agency.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Her advice to PSC members is to “know your contract and do not be afraid to ask questions of the union. There is a union structure in place,” she added, for members to reach out if something at work does not feel right. “Some people are hesitant to ask the question [about a workplace concern]. To me, it is better to know the answer to your question and then let the answer govern your actions.”

Since COVID, Moore said, work has become more crisis-driven. Members are under enormous pressure to work in new ways and oftentimes dealing with inflexible and punishment-driven bosses. It is extremely important for members to contact the union as soon as an issue arises, she urged. Members have 30 business days from when an issue occurred or when they became aware of the issue to file a grievance.

Not every member issue is technically a grievance, which entails a violation of the contract. But even those issues outside of an official grievance can still be a valid workplace concern, and PSC grievance representatives can advise members on how to handle a situation.


The PSC Grievance Process Explained

The illustration is a summary of the grievance process. For a more detailed explanation, contact your grievance counselor or go to

psc-cuny.org/rights/grievance-process

Illustrations on pages 10 and 11: Jud Guiteau

TIME IS TICKING



Contact the Union immediately even if you're not sure something is a grievance.

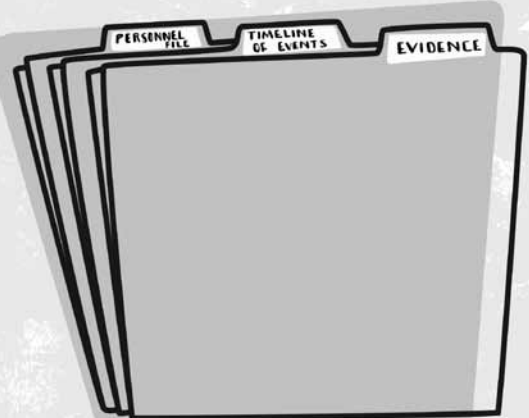
Find your PSC grievance representative at www.psc-cuny.org/who-we-are/grievance-counselors

30 WORKING DAYS

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
MARCH	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31	APRIL 1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10

The deadline to file a grievance is 30 working days from when a contract violation occurs or when you first become aware of the violation.

GATHER INFORMATION



With the union's guidance, gather materials to support your case.

“Most of the calls I take every day are not official grievances. I always tell members, ‘If something feels wrong, or you’re just not sure, there is no harm in giving us a call,’” said Emma Powell, a contract administration coordinator who has been at PSC since 2014. “We can always work through strategies, like writing a rebuttal to a guidance memo or an evaluation.”

Powell worked as an organizer at the PSC for nearly four years before joining the contract admin-

istration department and prior to that she headed membership at the National Union of Students in the United Kingdom, a confederation of higher education student unions. She often brings an organizing lens to a grievance.

For instance, there was an issue about HEO time sheets that was difficult to grieve. Instead, they found other HEOs with the same issue, and together along with help from the PSC organizing department, the HEOs worked collectively to turn

in time sheets that reflected the hours they worked and submitted for comp time.

ORGANIZING IS KEY

Greg Douros, who has worked on organizing and contract campaigns in the United States and internationally, sees contract enforcement and organizing as linked. Both are critical to placing pressure on the university to do the right thing.

Douros started working at the PSC as a contract administration

coordinator in June 2020. Despite joining the staff in the era of remote work and having never worked in the PSC office, he has become an integral part of the contract administration team, getting to know his colleagues through virtual meetings and talking to members one-on-one. Everything that a member is experiencing “at work” during the pandemic is amplified, he said.

Common issues that members express are workload increases, out-of-title duties, increased work

because of increased class sizes and shift work for CLTs.

His advice to members is to always keep good documentation: email a supervisor, summarize expectations, express workload concerns and write rebuttals to unfair evaluations even if you feel dispirited.

“When you enforce the contract, it becomes a real, living document. It’s not just a piece of paper,” said Douros. “Defending the violation of one member is the defense of all members.”

STEP ONE: PSC PRESENTS THE CASE

The PSC grievance representative presents the case to the college's labor designee.

STEP TWO: PSC FILES THE GRIEVANCE TO THE NEXT STEP OR PSC PRESENTS CLASS ACTION GRIEVANCES

If a grievance is denied at Step One, the grievance can be filed to Step Two. Witnesses can be called at a Step Two grievance.

ARBITRATION: PSC PRESENTS THE GRIEVANCE TO A NEUTRAL ARBITRATOR

The PSC Grievance Policy Committee reviews grievances that are denied at Step Two and votes on whether to take the issue to arbitration before a neutral arbitrator. At arbitration, evidence is presented and witnesses can be called.

SETTLEMENT
PSC AND CUNY REACH AN AGREEMENT

At any time during the grievance process, both parties can reach an agreement to resolve the grievance.

Know your contract

p s c - c u n y . o r g / p s c - c o n t r a c t s

PSC Grievance Counselors

At the PSC there are more than two dozen grievance counselors, some who work for the PSC in-house and others who are rank-and-file members who are trained in contract enforcement. At campuses, chapter grievance counselors represent full-time faculty. For a full list of representatives, go to tinyurl.com/chapter-grievance-reps. The PSC

also has in-house grievance counselors and advisors who are designated to represent titles at certain campuses: HEOs, CLTs, full-timers and adjuncts. For a full list, go to tinyurl.com/house-grievance-reps.

If you have a workplace concern, even if you are unsure that the concern rises to the level of a grievance, contact the union immediately.



15-MINUTE ACTIVIST

'Free the funds' letter

Through several federal stimulus packages, CUNY colleges have received more than \$891 million in federal money that can be used for institutional purposes related to COVID-19 (see story on page 3). The chancellor has the responsibility, the union believes, to allow CUNY colleges to use this money to reverse the layoffs and cuts of the past year and invest in a safe reopening in the Fall. Send him a letter urging him to do the right thing: <https://www.psc-cuny.org/issues/free-funds-letter>.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
61 Broadway, 15th Floor
New York, New York 10006
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New York, N.Y.
Permit No. 8049

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UNION VIEWS

Clarion | June 2021

REOPENING

Safety standards at CUNY

By BARBARA BOWEN

CUNY students, faculty and staff are eager to resume working and learning together on campus after a year of remote learning – but only if we can do so safely.

We are intensely conscious of the value of in-person learning and interaction at CUNY, especially because the communities CUNY serves have been pummeled by deaths from COVID, loss of income and the intensifying effects of systemic poverty and racism.

But there must be no return without a safe return. As our employer, CUNY has a legal and contractual responsibility to provide a workplace that is free of recognized hazards with the potential to cause serious illness or death. To date, the CUNY administration has failed to provide unified guidance or enforcement of the standards that must be met in order for colleges to reopen more broadly. Instead, responsibility for developing reopening plans has been delegated to individual colleges, with a patchwork of plans and uneven enforcement as the result.

RESEARCH

Drawing on the latest research on safe reopening and the scientific expertise available within the University, the PSC has developed ten standards to promote a safe reopening of CUNY. While the union will continue to seek to negotiate over specific reopening provisions, we believe there is an urgent need for thoughtful and rigorous standards that prioritize the lives and the safety of the entire University community.

The standards were developed in partnership with the union's Environmental Health and Safety Committee, which benefits from the leadership of faculty and staff with academic expertise in public health and environmental safety, and with reference to the New York State Guidance and Supplemental Guidance for safe reopening of higher education. The standards are rooted in the most recent and reliable scientific knowledge about the SARS-CoV-2 virus and what is needed to keep workers and students safe. They also reflect the requirements of the 1970 Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA), as enforced by the New York State Public Employee Safety and Health (PESH) plan.

The responsibility for providing a safe workplace rests with the employer, and the standards are not intended to be exhaustive.



Dave Sanders

Are CUNY campuses ready for in-person classes?

They will be updated frequently and supplemented by a technical document specifying how CUNY can achieve each standard and providing references to authoritative sources.

Nothing in the document waives any right of the PSC or its members under the contract or the law.

1. MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION IN REOPENING PLANS: PSC representatives – designated by the PSC, not by management – as well as student governance representatives and designated representatives of other unions, must participate as full decision-making members of each college reopening committee. The resulting plans, as required by the New York State Guidance, “should reflect engagement” with these representatives.

2. MAXIMIZE VACCINATION: CUNY must take actions to maximize vaccination within the University community, including providing education, opening vaccination sites on campuses, facilitating community vaccination and providing adequate time, not charged to annual leave, for receiving vaccinations and boosters. As a public university, CUNY should also take a lead role in making vaccination available to underserved communities. PSC-represented employees must be provided with sufficient time off to receive vaccination, and employees who do not accrue sick days must be afforded appropriate time off at full pay after being vaccinated if they experience

symptoms or side effects that interfere with their ability to work.

3. MINIMIZE INTRODUCTION OF INFECTION ON CAMPUS: CUNY must ensure that all colleges take the necessary measures to detect COVID-19 infection in symptomatic and asymptomatic people and prohibit individuals who have contracted the virus from entering CUNY campuses. For entrance onto campus, CUNY must require either proof of complete vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test within the timeframe established by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). Detection through regular COVID testing of PSC-represented employees may be implemented only if such testing is negotiated with the union, if appropriate privacy measures are in place and if testing is provided on campus and at other CUNY worksites.

4. MINIMIZE TRANSMISSION OF COVID-19 ON CAMPUS: CUNY must take all measures necessary to ensure that opportunities for transmission of COVID-19 on campus are minimized. Such measures include mandating wearing masks on campus; supplying PPE in clinical classes and other settings that require close contact; limiting occupancy of classrooms, offices, labs and other spaces to numbers that can maintain the required physical distance; maintaining a rigorous cleaning schedule; and employing a sufficient number of trained cleaning staff and protecting their safety.

5. PANDEMIC VENTILATION: CUNY must permit occupancy of buildings, worksites, rooms and

other spaces only if such spaces can be made to comply with authoritative ventilation guidelines designed to reduce transmission of COVID-19. CUNY must also adjust maximum occupancy limits to conform to distancing requirements and ventilation capacity.

6. ACCOMMODATIONS FOR REMOTE WORK: In order to protect the safety and health of individuals and the public, CUNY must permit PSC-represented employees in the following categories to work remotely: employees who, for documented medical reasons, cannot be vaccinated or cannot gain immunity through vaccination; and employees whose households include an individual who cannot receive COVID-19 vaccination for documented medical reasons and who is at high risk of serious illness or death from COVID. In addition, CUNY must seek to accommodate requests for remote work from employees who have the comorbidities currently identified by the CDC as incurring high risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19. CUNY must also be alert to the needs of employees covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act who may need additional accommodations because of changed worksite conditions.

7. RIGHT TO INSPECT: PSC members and/or their representatives continue to have the right under the law and the contract to conduct walk-throughs and inspections of any workplace in which PSC-represented employees are required to work. Inspections may be conducted pre-occupancy and during occupancy.

8. STANDARDS FOR LABORATORIES AND STUDIOS: CUNY must adhere to enhanced ventilation, occupancy and PPE standards developed for laboratories, studios and other situations where distancing may not be feasible. The PSC has offered more detailed guidance on standards for labs and studios in a separate document.

9. WORKLOAD: The transition to in-person work and the continuation of remote work must in no way increase the contractual workload of PSC-represented employees or require out-of-title work. Changes to duties related to reopening that require additional work time must be compensated with appropriate overtime pay, compensatory time or contact teaching hour credit. The right of academic departments to determine appropriate teaching modalities for all classes offered by the department must be respected.

10. COMPREHENSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE PLANS: CUNY college reopening plans for Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 must incorporate the above standards and be easily available for inspection by all CUNY students, staff and faculty. Colleges must also make available all relevant environmental inspection reports and records of compliance with approved reopening plans.

Standards for a safe return to work